

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 53
Number 3 *Volume 53, Number 3 (2023) Autumn
Issue*

Article 14

8-25-2023

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Kevin D. Stringer

Jelle J. H. Hooiveld

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Recommended Citation

Kevin D. Stringer & Jelle J. H. Hooiveld, "Urban Resistance to Occupation: An Underestimated Element of Land Warfare," *Parameters* 53, no. 3 (2023), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.3244.

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Urban Resistance to Occupation: An Underestimated Element of Land Warfare

Kevin D. Stringer and Jelle J. H. Hooiveld
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ABSTRACT: Due to a global trend toward urbanization and Russian and Chinese aggression toward Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, urban resistance to occupation merits greater study. The research here presents a much-needed and unique analysis of Dutch-language primary sources on the Netherlands' World War II urban resistance to occupation. It provides deeper insights into the occupation experiences of a highly urbanized, densely populated country in which clandestine underground and auxiliary elements played paramount roles in resistance efforts for most of the occupation period. It also illustrates the feasibility of overt, guerrilla-based activity in urban environments during the final phase of a conflict and offers insights into an understudied Landpower activity that modern at-risk countries should develop and hone.

Keywords: resistance to occupation, *Resistance Operating Concept*, underground, special operations forces, megacity

With the world trending toward urbanization and Russia and China acting aggressively toward Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, the conduct of irregular warfare in built-up environments—specifically, urban resistance to occupation (RTO)—merits greater study and emphasis in the Landpower domain. The objective of this paper is threefold: to encourage the incorporation of RTO capabilities into the national security planning of relevant US allies and partners against potential Russian or Chinese aggression, to offer an ideographic case study to catalyze deeper thinking in an area that possesses an underdeveloped theoretical base, and to contribute to the literature reservoir on urban resistance to occupation in both specificity and variety.

This examination begins with clarifications on terminology and a review of the limited nature of urban irregular warfare theory. It then proceeds to a discussion of the need for fresh and broader literature on this subject and subsequently highlights two limitations to the study of urban resistance that constrain research on this theme. Then, the article discusses the implications of urban terrain for clandestine resistance to occupation and conducts a deeper analysis of the case of urban resistance to occupation in World War II Netherlands, with an emphasis on the period

1944–45. This historical case, which has received relatively little attention in the literature, is by nature ideographic, meaning the case offers a broad and deep description of urban resistance to occupation. Such a description can contribute to further theory development as well as offer lessons for future consideration.¹

Chief among the case lessons are:

- the significance of tradecraft for longer-term survival in the urban resistance zone,
- the requirement for conventional ground force commanders to plan and prepare for liaison and collaboration with resistance organizations during major combat operations to employ the organizations' capabilities effectively, and
- the need for allied or national special operations forces or designated land force units to conduct security force assistance in peacetime to prepare selected elements of a threatened population for stay-behind resistance operations in urban terrain in the event of occupation.

Such activities are becoming increasingly relevant for countries like Estonia, Georgia, Moldova, Mongolia, and Taiwan that face potential occupation from a proximate adversary.²

Terminology

Recently, academic sources have conflated urban warfare and resistance and its implications for Landpower.³ Overt resistance to invasion and clandestine resistance to occupation in urban areas differ markedly.⁴ The definition of resistance to occupation is “the use of cellular formations and clandestine tradecraft to mask the resistance organization among the

1. Harry Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” in *Case Study Method*, ed. Roger Gomm, Martyn Hammersley, and Peter Foster (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), 119–64.

2. Vitalie Calugareanu and Robert Schwartz, “Russia Steps Up Threats against Republic of Moldova,” *Deutsche Welle* (website), February 4, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-steps-up-threats-against-republic-of-moldova/a-64612019>; and Mark Cancian et al., *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023).

3. Brian Mehan and Maciej Klisz, “Integrating Territorial Defence Forces into National Resistance Efforts: Lessons of the Polish Home Army’s Role within the World War II Polish Underground State and the Post-War Polish Independence Underground,” *Journal on Baltic Security* 8, no. 1 (2022): 95–119; and Derek Jones and J. Bryant Love, “Resilience and Resistance 2.0: Initial Lessons of Ukraine and the Implications of Resilience and Resistance Efforts to Deter and Respond to Invasion and Occupation by Revisionist Powers,” *Security Theory and Practice* 18, no. 3 (September 2022): 21–40.

4. Monika Lipert-Sowa and Derek Jones, “A Response: The Promises and Pitfalls of Developing Pre-Crisis Clandestine Underground Resistance Organisations Based on Lessons of the World War II Polish Underground State,” *Journal on Baltic Security* 8, no. 1 (2022): 8–28.

human terrain, often in an urban environment, while it conducts armed and nonviolent activities at the time and place of its choosing to maximize its ambiguity and stay viable throughout the occupation.”⁵ The resistance organization typically operates in clandestine action cells “in urban terrain or when under pressure from the occupier.”⁶ Urban combined arms battles like the Battle of Stalingrad (1942–43), Grozny (1999–2000), the First and Second Battles of Fallujah (2004), and Mariupol (2022) characterize the resistance to invasion category: overt combat and warfighting operations. The RTO Landpower activity, typically of a clandestine nature, is found in examples like occupied Warsaw (1939–45) and Northern Ireland (1968–98).

This investigation concentrates on clandestine resistance to occupation in urban environments where the aggressor has already seized the built-up area or metropole and has begun exercising physical control and political governance over the population. For clarity and uniformity, this article uses a multinational definition of resistance that focuses on the nation-state, not insurgent groups, and in which resistance is “a nation’s organized, whole-of-society effort, encompassing the full range of activities from nonviolent to violent, led by a legally established government (potentially exiled/displaced or shadow) to reestablish independence and autonomy within its sovereign territory that has been wholly or partially occupied by a foreign power.”⁷

Urban Irregular Warfare Theory

Urban resistance to occupation appears to have an underdeveloped theoretical base for current land warfare. Theories of urban irregular warfare, which mostly emerged from terrorist and insurgent thinkers in the 1960s, were a dialectic outgrowth and rejection of rural-based revolutionary warfare theory espoused by Cuban insurgent Che Guevara and French academic Régis Debray. The two primary urban insurgency theorists were Spanish-born author Abraham Guillén and Brazilian guerrilla leader Carlos Marighella. Guillén advocated protracted popular urban warfare in his many writings.⁸ Marighella, who was the most prominent proponent and practitioner of urban

5. Lipert-Sowa and Jones, “A Response,” 8–28; and Derek Jones, *Understanding the Form, Function, and Logic of Clandestine Insurgent and Terrorist Networks: The First Step in Effective Counternetwork Operations*, Joint Special Operations University Report 12-3 (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2012), 37.

6. Jones and Love, “Resilience and Resistance 2.0,” 21–40.

7. Otto C. Fiala, ed., *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, 2019), 21.

8. Abraham Guillén, *Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla*, trans. and ed. Donald C. Hodges (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1973).

irregular warfare, published his iconic *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* in 1969.⁹ Marighella promulgated the use of urban environments for violent action to catalyze national political revolution and change.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a close study of Mao Zedong, Carl von Clausewitz, and actual urban-based insurgencies demonstrated the concept is a theoretical and practical failure.¹¹ Reasons abounded for the defeat of these urban revolutions, but the primary ones were a significant presence of security forces in urban areas, insurgent vulnerability to defectors, mass arrests, and other police measures, as well as insufficient emphasis on the underground's security and secrecy.¹²

To address the twenty-first-century environment with great-power competition rather than insurgent revolutions, the 2019 Resistance Operating Concept (ROC), published by the Swedish Defence University and US Special Operations Command Europe, investigates primarily European-based World War II and Cold War historical examples and offers an applied theory of resistance and resilience in a single volume.¹³ The Resistance Operating Concept took these resistance experiences and placed the cases within a framework for application for national governments seeking to integrate RTO preparation into national security planning. Unfortunately, the Resistance Operating Concept narrowed its focus to primarily partisan or guerrilla-based resistance examples conducted mainly in nonurban and rural environments. Although the ROC writing team was aware of this limitation, time and resource constraints precluded wider research on vignettes with greater urban and underground components. One of the authors of this article was the US Special Operations Command Europe project leader for the publication of the Resistance Operating Concept. Feedback from several resistance-oriented symposiums in Eastern Europe post-publication confirmed the Resistance Operating Concept's inadequate coverage of urban resistance to occupation. Academics and practitioners at symposiums in Czechia, Georgia, and Hungary provided consistent feedback on this gap from 2021–22.

Although Anthony Joes asserts that urban guerrilla warfare has never achieved unambiguous success, the global trend of urbanization coupled with the concurrent reduction of nonurban terrain for resistance operations requires an obligatory twenty-first-century reevaluation of urban spaces

9. Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla* (Utrecht, NL: Foreign Languages Press, 2016); and Robert Moss, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare*, Adelphi Papers no. 79 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1971), 3.

10. Bard O'Neill, "Insurgent Strategies: An Examination of Four Approaches," in *American Defense Policy*, ed. John E. Endicott and Roy W. Stafford Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

11. Anthony James Joes, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 7.

12. Joes, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare*, 86–87.

13. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept*.

for the conduct of resistance to occupation.¹⁴ For if the ultimate goal during an occupation is to maintain the survivability of the resistance organization until its political goals—in this case, the restitution of state sovereignty from an occupying military power—have been achieved, then metropolitan areas may offer the only possible sanctuary until liberation. Unfortunately, insufficient literature has been devoted to this topic.

Literature

This article addresses a specific area of study and practice—namely, urban resistance to occupation—that lacks focused and current literature from a wider variety of historical examples. Much has been written about guerrilla- or partisan-based resistance in World War II in France, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, but urban operations are often addressed only peripherally.¹⁵ Poland (1939–45) is the exception, yet the vast literature on this historical example potentially skews the broader study of the phenomenon.

For example, the World War II-era Polish Underground State provides an exemplar of enduring survivability in the face of a highly effective and repressive German occupation regime. Two points are salient. First, the Polish Home Army headquarters remained operational in Warsaw throughout all of World War II against a highly adept and brutal German security apparatus, showing longer-term viability is possible in urban environments.¹⁶ Incredibly, the Polish resistance even survived the razing of Warsaw in 1944.¹⁷ Second, through evolving clandestine tactics and procedures, the Polish Underground State was able to maintain “the flawless functionality of the Polish state” while under occupation.¹⁸ Interestingly, besides its military component, the Polish Underground State conducted secret education, media, and cultural activities to maintain the resiliency of the population.¹⁹ This latter point demonstrates the need to examine the nonmilitary components of resistance in urban environments to reinforce citizen resilience and preserve population support and morale.

Yet other illustrative cases that might be useful do not give much insight into urban resistance to occupation. For instance, the Irish Republican Army campaign against perceived British occupation from 1969 to 1998 offers

14. Joes, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare*, 157.

15. Halik Kochanski, *Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939–1945* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2022); and M. R. D. Foot, *SOE: An Outline History of the Special Operations Executive, 1940–1946* (London: Bodley Head, 2014).

16. Foot, *SOE: An Outline History*, 213.

17. Katarzyna Utracka, “The Phenomenon of the Polish Underground State,” *Warsaw Institute Review* (website), December 4, 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/phenomenon-polish-underground-state/>.

18. Utracka, “Polish Underground State.”

19. Utracka, “Polish Underground State.”

insights into organizational adaptability and survivability derived through tradecraft and adaptive learning against a technologically advanced opponent, but most sources do not delve deeply into these matters.²⁰ Similarly, when the histories of the stay-behind organizations of the Cold War mention urban operations, the references are often only tangential to questions of underground strategy, organization, and missions. In addition, these cases were not tested in the crucible of an actual occupation.²¹ The book *Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite, 1956–1990*, which documents the Cold War stay-behind activities of the US Special Forces Berlin Detachment from 1956 to 1990, contains a discussion of preparation for urban resistance to occupation that is probably the most comprehensive.²² Yet the discussion relegates the focus on urban resistance to occupation to a secondary effort, given the spotlight on the history of this unique Special Forces unit. Hence, the deeper analysis in this article of Dutch urban resistance efforts in the latter part of World War II refreshes a literature base on a theme that is highly relevant to current land warfare and in need of more scholarship.

Limitations and the Dutch Opportunity

The study of urban resistance to occupation has two potentially major limitations. First, in Western states, the tactics, techniques, and procedures that govern resistance to occupation in urban environments are often classified and not accessible to the researcher. Second, this phenomenon, which has not been an area of primary national security concern for the past two decades, suffers from neglect and practitioners' lack of expertise. This latter challenge results from special operations forces or intelligence organizations, which would typically organize and lead such efforts, having been diverted to other missions during the war on terrorism.

For example, US Army Special Forces, the key mission of which is unconventional warfare and the development of resistance networks, has had limited opportunities to establish clandestine undergrounds

20. Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA: A History* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1993); James Dingley, *The IRA: The Irish Republican Army* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012); and Thomas A. Marks, "Counterinsurgency and Operational Art," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 13, no. 3 (2005): 168–211.

21. Kevin D. Stringer, "Building a Stay-Behind Resistance Organization: The Case of Cold War Switzerland against the Soviet Union," *Joint Force Quarterly* 86 (July 2017): 109–14; Olav Riste, "'Stay Behind': A Clandestine Cold War Phenomenon," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 35–59; Leopoldo Nuti and Olav Riste, "Introduction – Strategy of 'Stay Behind,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 7 (December 2007): 929–1024; and Tamir Sinai, "Eyes on Target: 'Stay-Behind' Forces during the Cold War," *War in History* 28, no. 3 (July 2021): 681–700.

22. James Stejskal, *Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite, 1956–1990* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2020).

for the conduct of resistance to occupation in urban areas given Special Forces' focus on direct action or foreign internal defense roles against violent extremist organizations in the Middle East since 2001. This overall unsatisfactory state of practitioner affairs limits comprehensive study of RTO phenomena and results in the need to use imperfect and incomplete sources for the analysis of resistance to occupation in urban areas as well as selective historical examples to paint the contours of this irregular warfare challenge in the land warfare domain.

Urbanization is one of the four “megatrends” author David Kilcullen postulates will characterize twenty-first-century warfare.²³ The phenomenal and relentless process of urbanization has implications for the conduct of urban resistance to occupation in Europe and worldwide. First, the location of the population determines where the battle for political control and sovereignty takes place. The urban population, defined as the percentage of the total population living in urban areas, in Central and Eastern European countries is typically over 60 percent.²⁴ Many European cities and surrounding regions grow together to form conurbations, which amplify the urban effect.²⁵ This trend was already evident during World War II, when Europe, with its large urban centers and advanced road and rail systems, provided less rural cover and concealment for guerrillas than East Asia.²⁶ But this same urbanization phenomenon occurred in Asia and Africa in the postwar era and has been further accelerating in the twenty-first century.

The authors of this article selected the Dutch case study because it has received relatively little attention, yet the case study provides the opportunity for deeper insights into urban resistance experiences. World War II Netherlands was a highly urbanized and densely populated environment in which the clandestine underground and auxiliary elements, as opposed to the associated guerrilla or partisan components,

23. David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Joes, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare*, 1–2.

24. “Germany,” *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, continuously updated), updated July 18, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/germany/>; “Poland,” *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, continuously updated), updated July 17, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/poland/>; “Estonia,” *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, continuously updated), updated July 14, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/estonia/>; and “Bulgaria,” *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, continuously updated), updated July 18, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bulgaria/>.

25. John English, *On Infantry* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 201–2.

26. Aaron Bank, *OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), 165.

played the paramount role in hindering the German occupier for most of the occupation period.

Case Study: The Netherlands and Urban Terrain in 1940

By the end of the 1930s, along with Belgium, the Netherlands was by far the most densely populated country in Western Europe.²⁷ This environment made the country a unique urban resistance theater in World War II. This situation was confirmed by the British head of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force mission to the Dutch government, who simply characterized the whole country as “one large garden city.”²⁸ Within this figurative megacity, an urban resistance developed that was engaged, equipped, advised, and mobilized by mainly Dutch special operations forces.

Besides its dense population, the Netherlands was already a highly developed, industrialized country with an excellent infrastructure. The ports and cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam possessed many important shipbuilding, engineering, and food-manufacturing companies. Another important industrial center was the Twente region, bordering Germany in the east. The remaining parts of the country primarily consisted of flat, agricultural lands, though they were interspersed with numerous local and urban trading centers.²⁹ Due to its small size and intensive use of the land, only eight percent of the Netherlands was still forested by the 1940s.³⁰

After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the subsequent outbreak of World War II, the Dutch government retained its policy of neutrality. A foreign power had not occupied the Netherlands since the Napoleonic era. Nevertheless, the Dutch army mobilized in August 1939 as a precaution. This army was, to a large extent, composed of undertrained draftees who were short of weapons and equipment. Ultimately, the intention to remain neutral was overridden in the early morning of May 10, 1940, when German troops crossed the Dutch border. Several days later, the Luftwaffe bombed Rotterdam, inflicting heavy civilian casualties. In the face of further

27. M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in the Low Countries* (London: St. Ermin's Press, 2001), 6–7.

28. J. K. Edwards to F. E. Morgan, memorandum, December 13, 1944, SMN/Fead/7, National Archives, London.

29. Kees Ribbens, *Verleden tijd: Nederland in de Jaren Dertig* (Zaltbommel, NL: Robas, 1992), 34–36; and J. A. Romein et al., *De lage landen bij de zee* (Utrecht, NL: W. de Haan, 1934), 541.

30. Martijn Boosten, “Nederlands bos(beheer): Al 250 jaar in ontwikkeling,” *Vakblad Natuur Bos Landschap* 127 (September 2016): 13.

German threats to attack Dutch cities, the commander of the Dutch army announced his decision to surrender the country that same day.³¹

Early Development of the Dutch Resistance

Since Adolf Hitler viewed the Dutch as a Germanic people, he immediately ordered the incorporation of the Netherlands into the Third Reich. At the end of May 1940, the initial German military administration was replaced by a civilian commissioner.³² The main goals of the German occupiers were to transform the Netherlands into a Nazi state and to exploit the Dutch economy for the benefit of the German war machine.³³ In the early phase of the occupation, the Germans chose a gentle approach, keeping interference in Dutch society to a minimum and hoping to win the support of the people. But in the months after the initial Dutch capitulation, the first underground groups emerged. Indeed, one of the first civilian resistance acts began during the early hours of the German invasion.³⁴ In the first year of occupation, the underground groups mainly focused on preparatory activities: building up resistance networks and collecting weapons and intelligence. Unorganized, minor acts of sabotage, such as cutting telephone wires and slashing the tires of German vehicles, spread throughout the country.³⁵

Due to the Dutch policy of neutrality, no prewar arrangements had been made for a stay-behind organization that would activate after an invasion. During the early days of the occupation, no radio communication channels existed between occupied Netherlands and the Dutch government-in-exile. This situation meant Dutch civilians who intended to resist the German occupier in an active or offensive way had to develop resistance methods and tactics without any prior training, experience, or external support. One major problem was a shortage of weapons and explosives: the Germans had requisitioned or confiscated most of the weapons that circulated in the country. Also, numerous German police and counterintelligence units such as the Gestapo, Sicherheitsdienst, and Abwehr—

31. C. M. Schulten, *Verzet in Nederland 1940–1945: “En verpletterd wordt het juk”* (Amsterdam: Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, 1995), 32–33.

32. Schulten, *Verzet in Nederland*, 32–38.

33. Louis de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1939–1945*, deel 7, Mei '43 – Juni '44 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 2:1030.

34. J. J. Jurrissen, *rapport betreffende het doorrijden van Duitse pantserreinen op 10 mei 1940* [report on the passage of German armored trains on May 10, 1940], June 13, 1940, in the authors' possession.

35. Schulten, *Verzet in Nederland*, 61.

assisted by collaborationist police forces, Nazi police auxiliaries, and native informants—began exercising strict control over the civilian population.³⁶

Due to the unfavorable demographic and geographic circumstances, Dutch resisters quickly realized they could not just detach from society. Establishing guerrilla bases in the countryside was out of the question in this small, urban, and populated country.³⁷ Although rural Netherlands was a safe haven for passive resistance groups and those in hiding, urban environments became the default hotbeds for active resistance units. In Amsterdam, for instance, a resistance group called CS-6 came into being that specialized in “customized guerrilla” actions in built-up areas.³⁸ The group’s members carried out assassinations of Dutch collaborators, conducted small-scale raids, and sabotaged enemy assets. Unfortunately, by the end of 1943, the occupier had infiltrated and eliminated CS-6, but other resistance groups continued these operations and effectively replaced the group.³⁹

Meanwhile, attempts to deploy British-trained Dutch agents in occupied Netherlands to support resistance groups failed miserably. Between 1941 and 1943, the well-functioning German security services swiftly captured most of these personnel, many of whom were sent by the British Special Operations Executive.⁴⁰

The Development and Actions of Dutch Urban Resistance during 1944–45

Whereas the Allied powers did not call upon the Dutch resistance and general population to carry out open or large-scale activities during the initial occupation years, this direction changed in the second half of 1944. After the successful Allied invasion in France, ground forces speedily advanced toward Belgium and the Netherlands during the summer of 1944. In early September 1944, Allied planners prepared Operation Market Garden, which aimed to establish a bridgehead over the Rhine River at the Dutch city of Arnhem, creating an Allied invasion route into Germany’s industrial heartland. To hamper transportation of German reinforcements and equipment via railways to the front line, the Dutch government-in-exile called

36. Jelle J. H. Hooiveld, *Dutch Courage: Special Forces in the Netherlands 1944–45* (Stroud, UK: Amberley Publishing, 2016), 24.

37. Kurt Zentner, *Illustrierte geschichte des widerstandes in Deutschland und Europa, 1933–1945* (Munich: Südwest, 1966), 27.

38. K. De Graaf to D. M. Borger, May 5, 1972, in the authors’ possession.

39. Withuis Jolande, “Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946–50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma,” *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 3 (1994): 293–313.

40. Foot, *SOE in the Low Countries*, 85.

for a nationwide railway strike. This action was extremely successful from a military perspective because almost all railway personnel ceased working and went into hiding.⁴¹ The majority of German reinforcements coming from the west of the country, were forced to travel to the front line by other, more time-consuming means during the first crucial days of the operation.⁴² Subsequently, inter-Allied Jedburgh teams that were attached to conventional airborne divisions successfully mobilized Dutch resistance and civilians inside the airhead. The American commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, Major General James Gavin, who had seen Dutch civilians eagerly supporting his forces in and around the city of Nijmegen, described the resistance's performance as "exemplary."⁴³ Unfortunately, Operation Market Garden ultimately failed, which delayed the liberation of the rest of the Netherlands.

The failure of the Allied powers to liberate the Netherlands quickly offered Dutch personnel from the recently created Bureau Bijzondere Opdrachten, or Special Operations Bureau, an opportunity to continue the Allied powers' operations and expand the bureau's footprint across the country. Many of these personnel worked inside major Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and the Hague, instructing resistance members and coordinating their operations.⁴⁴ Built-up environments offered anonymity and the ability to blend into the populace. Moreover, plenty of sabotage targets, such as government and distribution offices, collaborators, and industrial objects, were available.⁴⁵ Working in built-up areas required extreme secrecy, excellent command of the local language, and superb tradecraft skills. A Bureau Bijzondere Opdrachten agent who instructed resistance members in Rotterdam recalled, "When lecturing members, I always put security first, whatever their work was. Without being security-minded you are absolutely stuck and can't work."⁴⁶ Besides security, resistance cadres provided training in subjects such as sabotage, weapon handling, and street-fighting tactics.⁴⁷ Firing weapons was out of the question in these urban locations. Exceptionally, in several urban areas, underground soundproof basements were used for small-scale, live-fire exercises. Out of necessity, Bureau Bijzondere Opdrachten agents often used public places such

41. Hooiveld, *Dutch Courage*, 63–64.

42. Christ Klep and Ben Schoenmaker, *De bevrijding van Nederland 1944-1945: Oorlog op de flank* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgeverij, 1995), 151.

43. Hooiveld, *Dutch Courage*, 126.

44. "Netherlands October 1944 – May 1945," Special Operations Executive War Diary 49, HS7/276, National Archives, London.

45. Rogier van Aerde et al., *Het grote gebod: Gedenboek van het verzet in LO en LKP* (Kampen, NL, and Bilthoven, NL: J. H. Kok N.V. and H. Nelissen, 1951), 547.

46. "Report Mission, Shooting," March 18, 1945, Special Operations Executive personnel file J. H. Luykenaar, National Archives, London.

47. "Report Mission, Shooting," March 18, 1945; and "Report Mission Monopoly," June 29, 1945, Special Operations Executive personnel file G. de Stoppelaar, National Archives, London.

as swimming pools to train resistance groups.⁴⁸ Notably, around April 1945, in heavily urbanized Rotterdam, some 5,000 urban guerrillas were clandestinely formed and trained to act on Allied orders.⁴⁹ The Germans surrendered before the Allied powers reached Rotterdam, however, and this large Dutch resistance organization was not ordered to mobilize en masse. Although this development was a major disappointment to the resistance, most of its members kept discipline and refrained from unauthorized action.⁵⁰

Due to the postponement of the liberation of the Netherlands, the Allied high command did not issue national or regional offensive orders to the Dutch resistance to engage in large-scale activities in support of Allied conventional forces in the autumn or winter of 1944–45. But this situation did not mean the Dutch underground, which a solid core of Dutch Bureau Bijzondere Opdrachten agents was now supporting, refrained from action. In several cities, Dutch resistance fighters conducted urban operations. In November 1944, the resistance in the Twente region seized over *f*46 million—equivalent to roughly USD\$314 million in 2023—in the city of Almelo in the biggest bank robbery in Dutch history.⁵¹ Later that month, Allied air forces bombed the Amsterdam office of the notorious Sicherheitsdienst based on the targeting information provided by the local urban resistance. The resistance in the city of Leeuwarden, in northern Netherlands, freed over 50 political prisoners in a highly successful prison raid in December 1944. Another striking example of resistance efforts was the sinking of various major ships that had been confiscated by the Germans in the harbor of Rotterdam.⁵²

Also noteworthy were Allied efforts, which proved to be ineffectual, to involve the Dutch resistance in battling the threat of V-weapons from key German military installations. From early September 1944 onward, occupied Netherlands became an important launch site for these German terror weapons, which were aimed primarily at London and Antwerp. The areas surrounding these firing points were extremely well guarded. Without heavy weapons or the ability to organize into larger groups due to tight German control, Dutch resistance could not attack these weapon systems directly. Hence, resistance groups attempted to disrupt German supply routes to these sites. But due to the high concentration of roads and railways in occupied Netherlands, the Germans could easily bypass sabotage locations

48. “Report Mission Shooting,” May 25, 1945, Special Operations Executive personnel file J. H. Luykenaar, National Archives, London.

49. J. L. van der Pauw, *Guerrilla in Rotterdam* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgeverij, 1995), 340.

50. Van der Pauw, *Guerrilla in Rotterdam*, 347–64.

51. Hooiveld, *Dutch Courage*, 146.

52. Van der Pauw, *Guerrilla in Rotterdam*, 195–96, 241.

and use alternate roads and railways.⁵³ This condition severely limited the long-term effect of such sabotage on enemy rocket operations.

Analysis and Lessons for Landpower

Resistance to occupation in an urban area against a vicious and thorough adversary is an activity fraught with risks. Distilling key lessons from the in-depth Dutch case yields some urban resistance principles for consideration and further research. First, the Dutch example demonstrates the significance of tradecraft for longer-term survival in the urban resistance zone. In the Netherlands, for most of the occupation period, the resistance operated clandestinely rather than overtly. Despite the high concentration of German security forces, built-up areas proved to be fertile hatcheries for resistance groups and their clandestine activities. This case also illustrates Dutch special forces sent behind enemy lines to aid the resistance were able to survive and operate in a densely populated urban environment over a long period. Command of the national language, knowledge of the local culture, and a credible cover enabled the forces to blend into the populace.

But today, technology complicates this situation. Unlike the German occupier in World War II, current-day adversaries use modern surveillance technology, ranging from biometrics to artificial intelligence, in urban environments. For example, facial recognition, a biometric technology that enables the automated identification of a person, will create new and complex security challenges for current and future resistance members and their embedded special operations forces. A low-key digital footprint in both personal and professional life through all stages of conflict becomes an obvious precondition for the successful survival of the twenty-first-century urban resister and his support network. In confirmation, China—a global facial recognition giant—has increasingly focused the training of its special operations forces and police forces on urban warfare and urban counterinsurgency using such technology.⁵⁴ Similarly, a preliminary lesson from the Russian occupation of Ukraine is “any resistance network established prior to a conflict must be invisible to the bureaucracy of the state, or else it risks exposure through the capture of a state’s records.”⁵⁵ These threats require a vigorous inventory

53 C. Huurman, *Het spoorwegbedrijf in oorlogstijd, 1939–'45* (Rosmalen, NL: Uitgeverij Uquilair, 2001), 378–79.

54 Elsa B. Kania and Ian Burns McCaslin, *The PLA's Evolving Outlook on Urban Warfare: Learning, Training, and Implications for Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2022), 25–26; and Phil Stewart, “China Racing for AI Military Edge over US: Report,” Reuters (website), November 28, 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-ai-idUSKBN1DS0G5.

55 Jack Watling, *Oleksandr Danyluk, and Nick Reynolds, Preliminary Lessons from Russia's Unconventional Operations during the Russo-Ukrainian War, February 2022 – February 2023* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, March 2023), 34.

and evaluation of the extensive range of modern countermeasures applicable to the digital and physical domains to augment the tradecraft skills of urban resisters and special operations forces.

Second, calibrating resistance activities to focus on economic sabotage, political subversion, and intelligence gathering seemed to contribute to longer-term survivability in metropolitan areas—especially in the beginning, by avoiding extreme reprisals at the nascent stages of urban resistance development. Indeed, many Dutch resistance members were reluctant to carry out assassinations and direct action against enemy personnel. As typical urban resistance actions, these types of missions usually resulted in heavy reprisals, such as mass shootings of political prisoners.⁵⁶ Discrete, nontraceable acts of sabotage proved to be less risky during the first years of the occupation. According to Henk Veeneklaas, a highly decorated, key member of the Dutch resistance, in the early stages of an occupation, small, densely populated urban areas are most suited for such economic warfare and subversive actions against an occupier. Veeneklaas, holder of the Military Order of William, the highest military decoration in the Netherlands, was a leading member in the Dutch resistance who was later involved in the creation of the Cold War Dutch stay-behind organization.⁵⁷ These activities, which are usually lower profile, allow the resistance to germinate, develop, and gain experience. This perspective finds support from a recent report of initial lessons learned from the Russian occupation of Ukraine. To survive, Ukrainian resistance networks avoid direct action unless liberation is imminent. Rather, Ukrainian RTO activities concentrate on conducting reconnaissance, gathering intelligence, and understanding the enemy's occupation system.⁵⁸

The digital and cyber domains of economic warfare and sabotage cannot be ignored in the twenty-first-century urban environment. Whereas World War II Dutch urban sabotage revolved around damage to physical objects, modern-day resisters should have offensive cyber skills to maximize the disruptive effect on the adversary and targeted urban infrastructure. This requirement also means special operations forces attached to these resistance groups should bring such knowledge and competence to the table.

56. Ruud Huyskamp, *Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: German Oppression, Dutch Resistance, and the Tragedy at De Woeste Hoeve* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2011).

57. Jelle J. H. Hooiveld, "De beginfase van de 'O'-tak van de Nederlandse stay-behind-organisatie," *Militaire Spectator* 189, no. 7/8 (July 2020): 372–85; and G. M. H. Veeneklaas, "Report on Preparation for Clandestine Warfare in the Netherlands," June 19, 1948, in the authors' possession.

58. Watling, Danyluk, and Reynolds, *Preliminary Lessons*, 30, 34.

Fortunately, US Army Special Operations Command has begun to explore this developmental area with its Space–Cyber–Special Operations Forces triad.⁵⁹

Third, urban resistance leadership needs to consider carefully when to move from clandestine to overt operations. This decision, which is heavily driven by the proximity of large-scale, conventional liberation forces, aims to avoid the resistance organization becoming fixed and destroyed by occupation security forces, as in World War II Warsaw. In the final weeks of the occupation, Dutch resistance groups gave valuable support to Allied ground forces during the liberation of several cities and built-up areas. As mentioned, resistance forces were actively involved in the liberation of the city Nijmegen and its surroundings. Another example is the city of Deventer. Canadian ground forces gave the “extremely well-organized Dutch underground” much credit for the speedy clearing of the town, which also partly saved the city’s critical infrastructure.⁶⁰ Lastly, after the fighting had ceased, liberated resistance forces were often valuable assets in relieving conventional soldiers of urban guard duties and other tasks for which insufficient military personnel were available.⁶¹

Hence, given the aforementioned examples, conventional ground force commanders must plan and prepare to liaise and collaborate with resistance organizations during major combat operations to employ the organizations’ capabilities effectively.⁶² The current Russia-Ukraine War opaquely demonstrates the force multiplier benefits of this type of cooperation. The important preparatory role of special operations forces as well as their ability to act as a tactical communications link between advancing ground forces and resistance groups in the final phase of a conflict must be stressed. Furthermore, modern urban resistance forces equipped with highly effective, compact, and portable weapons can potentially contribute even more than their World War II predecessors during the overt liberation phase of operations.

Finally, no prewar arrangements had been made for a stay-behind organization in the Netherlands that could activate after an invasion. On their own initiative, Dutch civilians were forced to develop resistance

59. Jen Judson, “Army Space, Cyber, and Special Operations Commands Form ‘Triad’ to Strike Anywhere, Anytime,” *Defense News* (website), August 11, 2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/space-missile-defense/2022/08/11/army-space-cyber-and-special-operations-commands-form-triad-to-strike-anywhere-anytime/>.

60. C. P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, vol. 3 (Ottawa, CA: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1960), 551; and K. H. Vos et al., *Deventer 1940–1945: Het begin, de donkere jaren en de bevrijding* (Deventer, NL: Arko Boeken, 1985), 127.

61. Captain T. J. Allen, notes on the takeover by the Dutch Military Government, quoted in Historical Section, *The German Surrender*, May 1945, Report no. 56 (Ottawa, CA: Canadian Army Headquarters, April 1958), 35–36.

62. Kevin D. Stringer, “Force Integration in Resistance Operations: Dutch Jedburghs and US Alamo Scouts,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 102 (July 2021): 90–95.

methods and tactics without any prior training, experience, or external support. The absence of large, rural areas inaccessible to the Germans made the concentration, training, and employment of large groups of guerrillas impossible in the Netherlands. Hence, resistance organizations were forced to seek the security and operational maneuver space of urban environments. Though twenty-first-century technologies enable the adversary to exercise control in new ways, modern special operations forces or designated land force units—allied or national—need to conduct security force assistance to prepare selected elements of a threatened population in peacetime for stay-behind resistance operations in urban terrain in the event of an occupation. For countries like Georgia, Moldova, Mongolia, and Taiwan, this preparation is prudent and relevant, given the adversarial threats they face. Equally, these countries' partner states should examine how to contribute to the development of such land warfare capability in the academic and practitioner realms for successful urban resistance to occupation, considering the twenty-first-century resources of state adversaries.

Kevin D. Stringer

Dr. Kevin D. Stringer (colonel, US Army retired) is a visiting professor at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania and a lecturer at the Baltic Defence College. With 30 years of commissioned military service, primarily in the US special operations community, Stringer conducts research that focuses on irregular warfare, special operations, and resistance. He is a holder of the Estonian Defence Forces Meritorious Service Cross for his work on resistance initiatives in that country.

Jelle J. H. Hooiveld

Jelle J. H. Hooiveld (master of science, bachelor of economics) is a senior lecturer and team coordinator within the Security Management bachelor's degree program at Saxion University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. Hooiveld's research focuses on early unconventional warfare and resistance experiences in urbanized, industrialized, and densely populated environments. He is the author of several books and articles about the deployment of Allied Jedburgh teams; British, Belgian, and French Special Air Service units; and intelligence personnel in occupied Netherlands during 1944–45. At Leiden University, he is completing his doctoral dissertation on the Dutch and Allied special operations forces' support of Dutch resistance movements during 1944–45.

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