


THE TWO SIDES OF GROZNY
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CHECHNYA:
Urban Warfare Lessons Learned



Marine Corps Intelligence Activity—Arthur Speyer

The strategies and tactics employed by the Chechen resistance in the battle of Grozny offer outstanding lessons for future urban operations. Grozny, the capital of the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya, is the site of the largest urban warfare operation since the end of World War II. The Chechen resistance that continues to fight a prolonged conflict against Russian forces provides a model of the 21st-century urban insurgency. Chechen tactics are being studied by

insurgent groups worldwide and may one day be used against U.S. forces in the streets of Kosovo, Bosnia, Indonesia, or Liberia.

Why Chechnya Matters



“The future of war is not the son of Desert Storm, but the stepchild of Chechnya.”

—General Krulak
USMC (ret.)



- Largest urban battle since World War II
- Russia employed all aspects of conventional military power within an urban environment

The Chechens keenly demonstrated how a small, decentralized, and lightly-armed insurgency can defend against a larger, conventionally organized military in an urban environment.

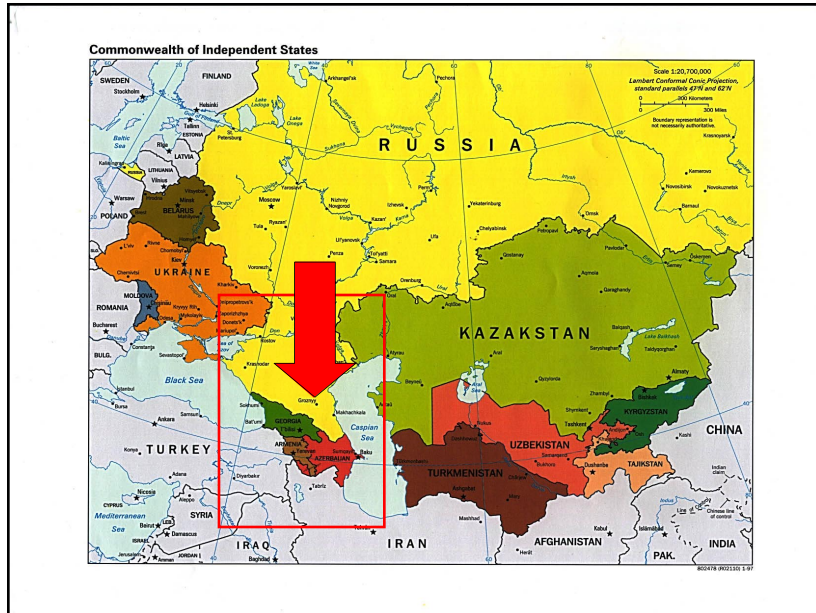
The Chechen Resistance



- Textbook example of the modern urban guerilla
- Conducted asymmetric warfare
- Nationalistic/religious political
- Ties to international organizations



The Chechens knew they could not defeat the Russians in a direct conflict. To counter Russian strength, the Chechens attacked Russian weaknesses. They moved throughout the city and denied the Russians a true front line. The Chechens attacked again in the Russian rear and denied the Russians a decisive battle. The Chechens also used contacts abroad, mainly in the Middle East and Turkey, to acquire equipment and seasoned fighters.



The Chechens are an Islamic, clan-based ethnic group that inhabits the mountainous Caucasus region of southern Russia, one of the most ethnically diverse areas of the world. The group is fighting for independence from Russia for a mix of political, cultural, religious, and economic reasons. The Russians and the Chechens fought two major battles for control of Grozny; one during the winter of 1994–95 and the second during the winter of 1999–2000.

Background to the Conflict



- Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation
- Long history of resisting Russian control
- Began latest drive for independence in 1990

The Chechen people have a long history of resisting Russian control. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, they began in earnest to seek full independence. In 1994, Chechnya became a civil war battleground between pro-independence and pro-Russian factions.

In December 1994, Russia sent approximately 40,000 troops into Chechnya to restore Russian primacy over the breakaway republic.

Grozny—Pre-War



50,000 people
68 square miles
High rises
Industrial areas
Suburbs
Modern by
Soviet
standards

The Chechens



- Clan-based mountain people
- Long history of fighting Russian aggression
- Islamic
- Trader/dealer culture

Chechen Strategy



- Inflict Russian casualties
- Extend the conflict
- Attack in rear areas
- Bring the fight to advantageous geography



The Chechens had no illusions about fighting the Russians. They knew they could not conduct conventional combat operations against them and win. However, they believed they could inflict serious damage if they could draw the Russians into the urban environment. As the battles for Grozny progressed, the Chechens began to realize the distinct advantages the urban environment gave to their decentralized operations.

While the Russians concentrated on securing territory, the Chechens aimed to inflict Russian casualties and extend the conflict. Chechen leadership sought to cause one hundred Russian casualties daily; the Chechens believed if they could continue the war and inflict high numbers of Russian casualties, Russia would eventually pull out.

Russian Strategy






- Seize and hold key terrain
- Destroy Chechen resistance
- End war quickly



The Russian strategy was simple and direct: gain control over the territory of Chechnya and destroy Chechen resistance.

Order of Battle



	
Russians	Chechens
45,000 men—1995	15,000 men
95,000 men—2000	

During the first war in 1995, the Russians deployed over 45,000 troops from across the wide range of Russian security services to the Chechen theater. In 2000, that number doubled to approximately 95,000 troops. Chechen numbers are hard to judge due to the large number of part-time fighters. The Chechens likely had 15,000 men under arms though they rarely had more than 2,000–3,000 fighters in the city of Grozny at any one time.

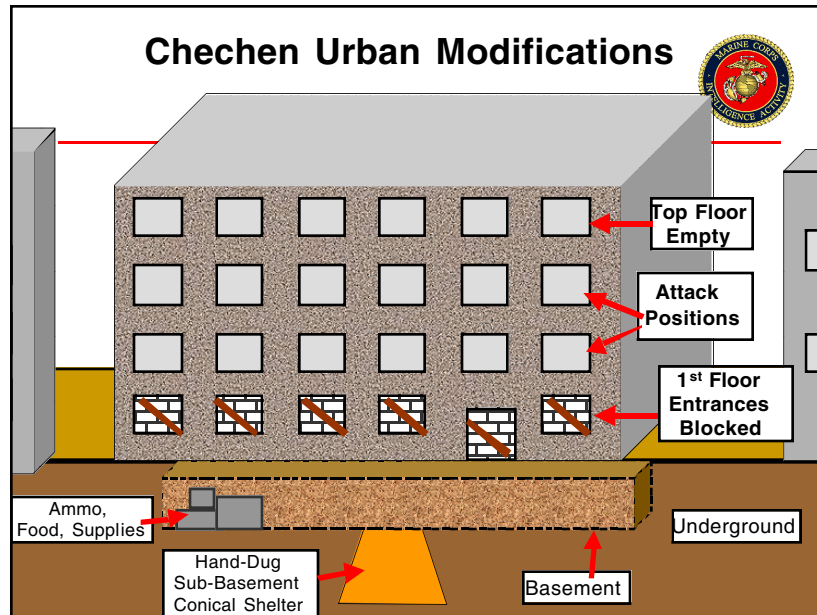
The Chechen Defense of Grozny



- Chechens planned city defense for two years
- City manager and city engineer involved
- Intimate knowledge of streets, buildings, and strategic intersections



The Chechens knew that the Russians would send armor units directly into Grozny to destroy the Chechen resistance. The Chechens used the urban geography to plan their defense. City officials who controlled Grozny's roads, telephones, and power advised the Chechen military leadership. The Chechens drew on their intimate knowledge of local streets, buildings, and key intersections to defeat their enemy.



The Chechens would use urban structures as defensive positions. As the conflict progressed, they became expert at further modifying urban structures to give themselves extra protection against Russian forces. The Chechens would board up the first floor windows and doors to prevent their use by Russian ground troops. The top floor would be left empty for fear of Russian artillery or air attack. The Chechens would use basements and dig sub-basements to store supplies and survive massive Russian artillery strikes.

Initial Assault



- December 31, 1994
- City approached from east, west, and north
- Light resistance for Northern Group
- Northern Group convoys to center of city at dusk
- Long armored columns, no supporting infantry



After reaching the Chechen capital of Grozny, approximately 6,000 Russian soldiers mounted a mechanized attack into the urban area. The attack was launched simultaneously from three directions and featured tanks supported by infantry riding in BMP infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs). Instead of the anticipated “cake walk,” Russian forces encountered heavy resistance from Chechen forces armed with large quantities of antitank weapons. The Russian attack was repulsed with shockingly high Russian casualties. It took another two months of heavy fighting and adapting Russian tactics to finally capture Grozny.

The Chechen Counter-Attack



- Attacked at sundown
- Chechens drew Russian forces into city center
- Chechen scouts monitored progress through suburbs
- Russian forces panicked



Russians lost 102 of 120 APC/IFV and 20 of 26 tanks

The Russians used a combination of vehicles during the first attack to include BMPs, BTRs, and MTLBs. The Chechens monitored Russian movement through the city using small, hand-held, off-the-shelf Motorola radios. They intentionally drew the Russians into urban canyons where they could ambush them and reduce Russian combat advantages.

Russian Combined Arms



STORM GROUP

Motorized Infantry Company

Tank Platoon

Artillery Platoon

Mortar Platoon

AGS-17 Platoon

Engineer Platoon

Chemical Troops



Russian Infantry/Conscripts



- Basic fire and maneuver skills lacking
- NCO and junior officer leadership weak
- Many hid, ran, panicked, or deserted

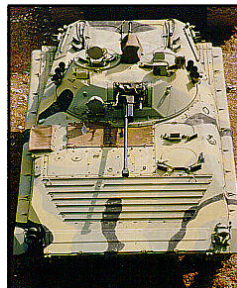


- Young, unhealthy, untrained
- Over 2/3 had less than 6 months military experience
- Low morale

Infantry Fighting Vehicles



- High attrition rates
- Many lost at point-blank ranges to RPGs and heavy machine guns
- Increased ammunition needs due to nature of urban warfare



Air Defense Vehicles



- High-elevation weapons were excellent for urban combat
- 4,000–5,000 rounds per minute
- Excellent anti-sniper weapon
- Light armor proved vulnerable, became a prime target for Chechens



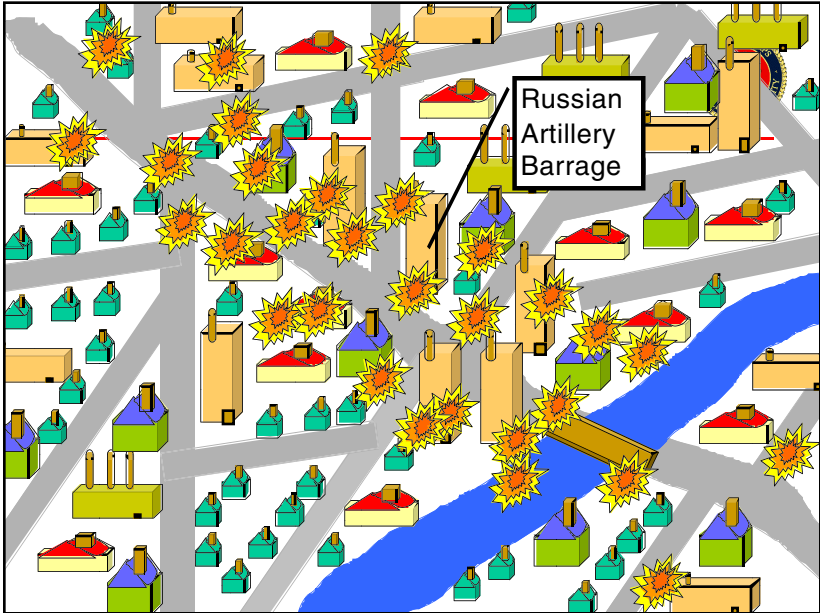
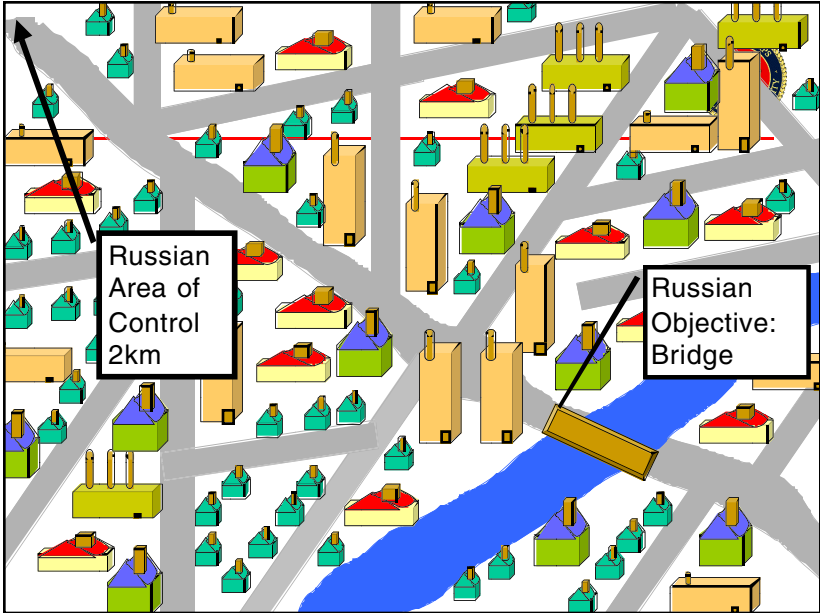
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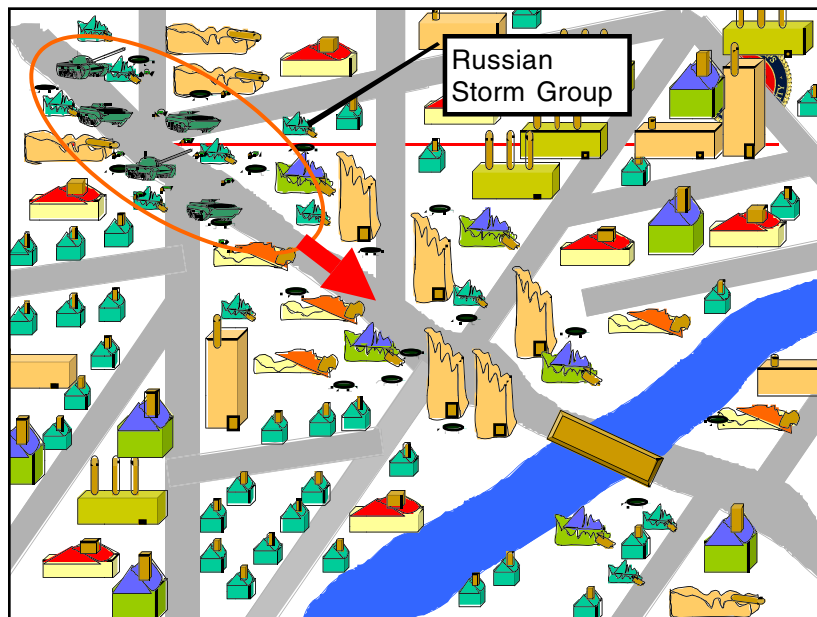
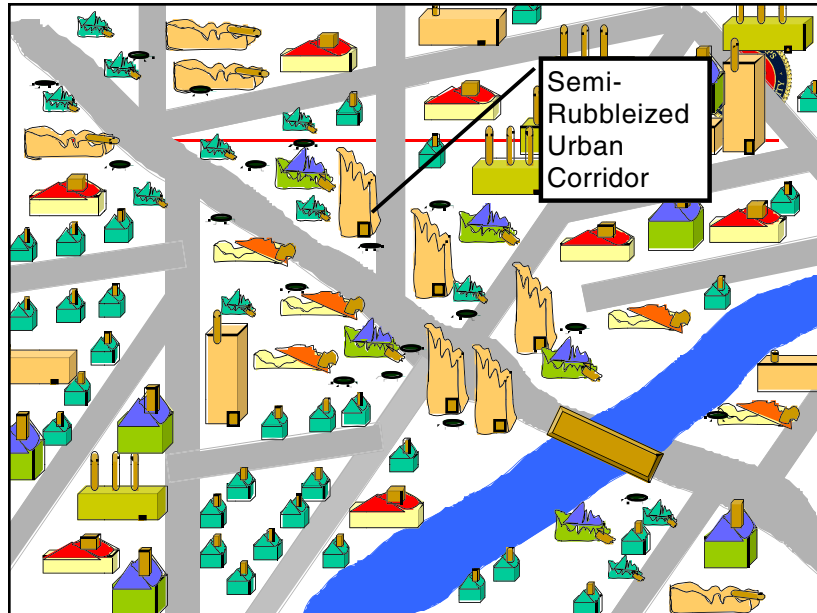
Russian Artillery



- Massed artillery used to devastate large areas of Grozny
- Used to compensate for poor infantry performance
- Russian artillery units outnumbered maneuver units around Grozny







Intelligence



- Limited accurate maps
- Underestimated threat
- Cultural arrogance
- Did not conduct proper reconnaissance of city
- Value of imagery limited



Throughout the conflict, the Chechens had a well-developed human intelligence (HUMINT) network in the city. Chechen fighters rarely wore military uniforms and could easily blend into the city population. The locals were an excellent information source for the Chechens; they would routinely report Russian movements using small hand-held radios and couriers. Young women were particularly useful intelligence agents as they could easily move throughout the city.

Rotary Wing



- Employed weapons at stand-off range on city ring
- Would rarely venture into urban canyon for fear of attack
- Mainly used for logistic support



Airpower



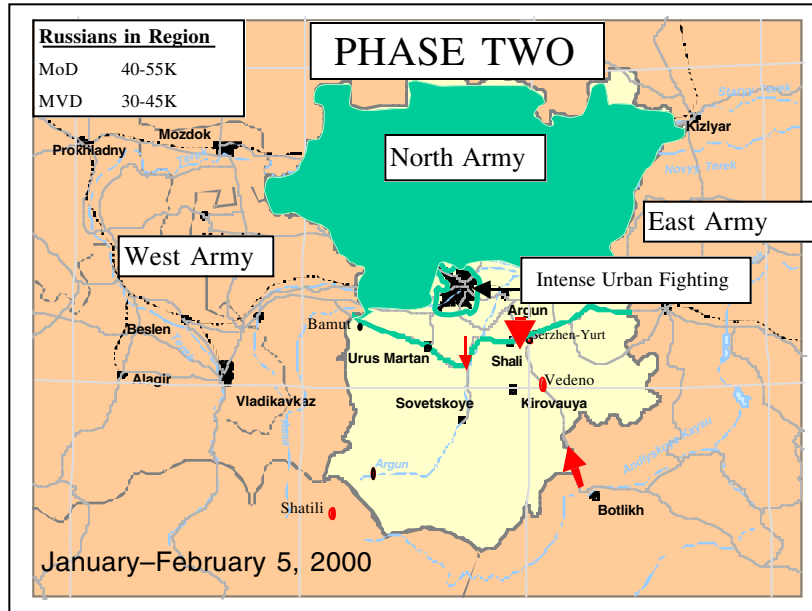
- Hampered by poor weather
- Little direct support of ground troops
- Used free-fire zones
- Employed laser-guided bombs against high value targets

Why Chechnya 1999?



- Internal Security and the “Near Abroad”
- The military wanted to avenge loss in 1996
- Re-establish Russia as a legitimate superpower
- Stabilize/control oil region
- Fight “terrorism”
- Election year politics



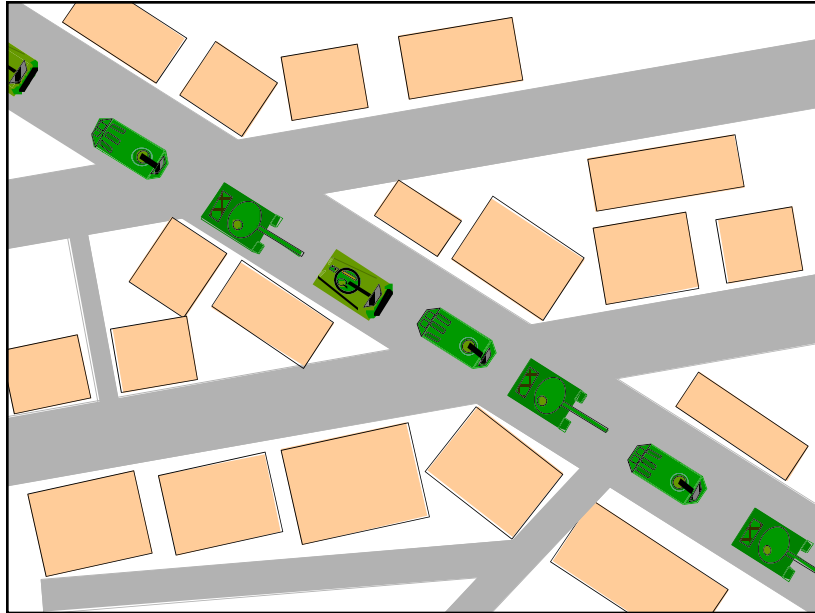


TOS-1 in Chechnya

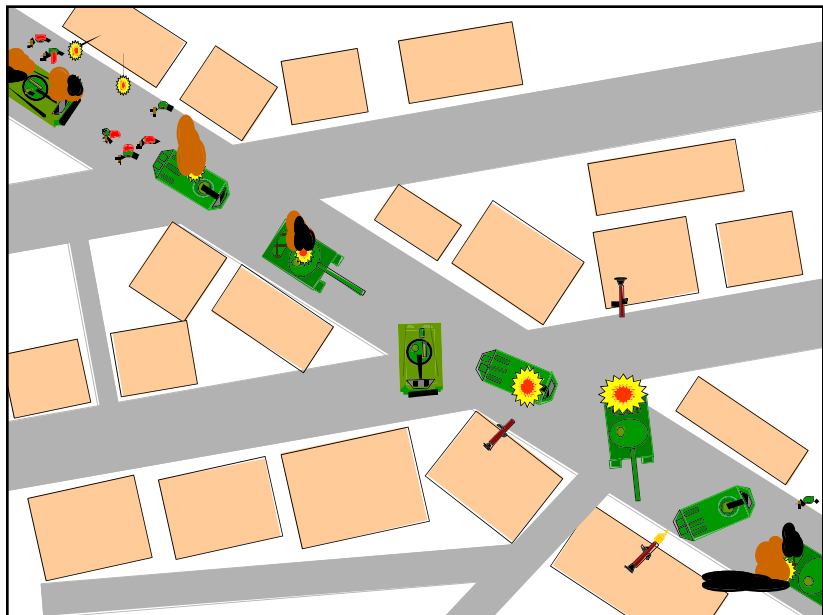
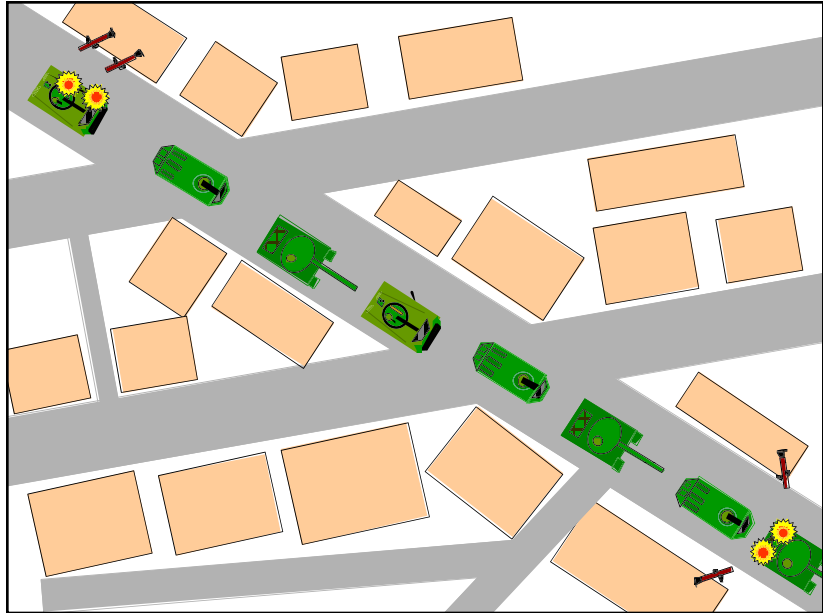


- Mounted on T-72 chassis
- 220mm rocket tubes
- Unguided
- 4 warheads: napalm, FAE, thermobaric, thermite

Russian More-Than-Lethal



These graphics depict the Chechen counterattack on New Year's Eve 1994. The Russians were moving in a single column through the city with no supporting infantry. The Chechens attacked the front and rear vehicles. Once they were disabled, the other vehicles had little room to maneuver. The Chechens then moved down the line destroying the remaining Russian vehicles. The Russian forces panicked and could not launch a counterattack.



Chechen Urban Tactics




- Fought as light 25-man highly mobile teams
- Urban ambushes would rarely involve more than 75 fighters
- Would attack Russian units and break them into smaller pieces
- Owned the night



The Chechens made use of (and sometimes discarded) the often plentiful stock of captured Russian equipment. This included Russian Night Vision Devices (NVDs) for maneuver at night, maneuver often completed while under Russian bombardment. The Russians normally did not move at night or during periods of heavy fog while operating in the city. The Chechens used fog to mask their movement. They also keyed on the Russian use of smoke as an obscurant, taking it as an indicator of Russian movement. The Chechens would fire into the smoke with positive effect during Russian displacements.

Chechen Tactical Formations



8-Man Fighting Group

2 Heavy Machine Guns

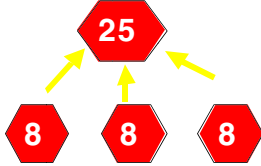
2 RPGs


1 Scout/Sniper

1 Rifleman/Medic

1 Rifleman/Radioman

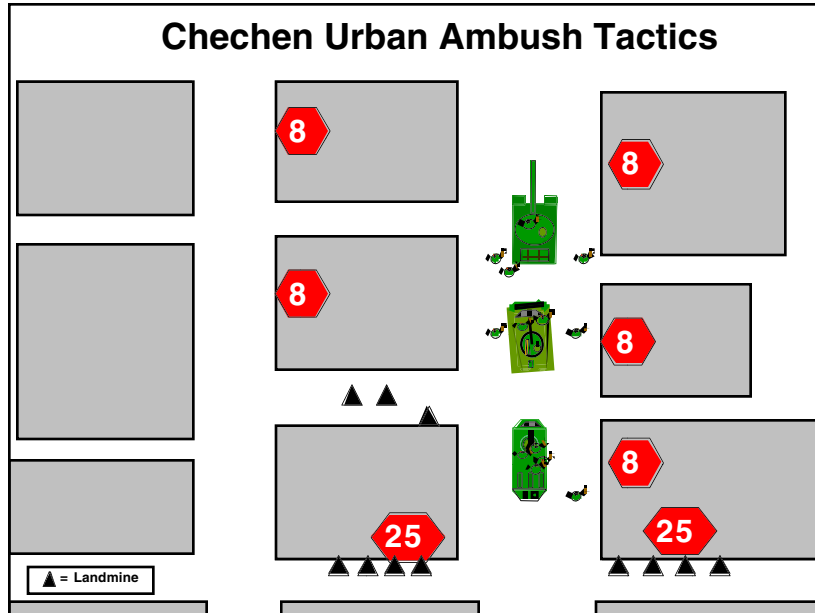
1 Rifleman/Ammo



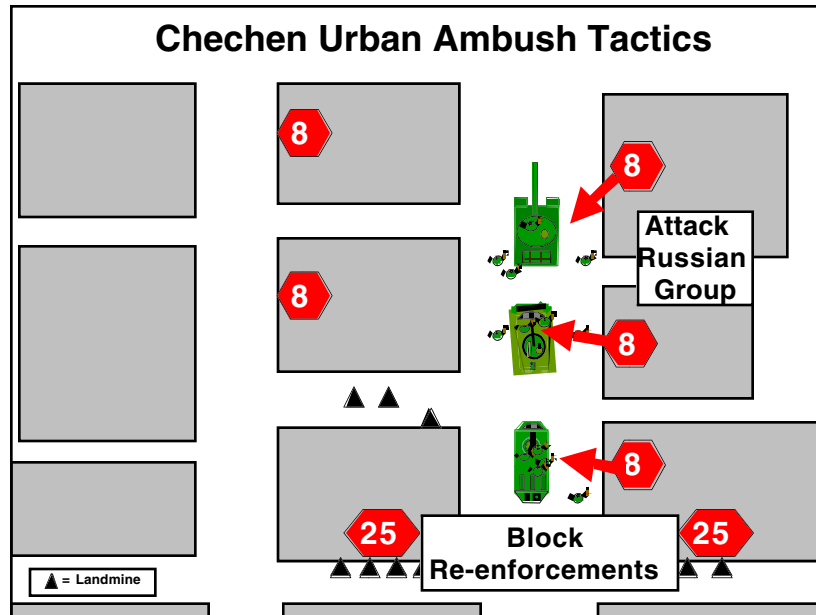


Highly Mobile
No Body Armor

The Chechens centered their eight man subgroups (armor hunter-killer teams—squad equivalent) on the RPG (“Chechnya’s national weapon”). Each subgroup contained three riflemen/automatic riflemen/ammunition bearers, two RPG gunners, one sniper, and two machine gunners. The sniper was also often employed as a spotter.



In the conduct of armor and personnel ambushes, the Chechens configured their forces into 75-man groups. These were further broken down into three 25-man groups (platoons). These platoons were further broken down into three equal-sized teams of six to eight fighters each (squads). Each squad had two RPG gunners and two PK (machinegun) gunners. The 75-man unit (company) had a mortar (82mm) crew in support with at least two tubes per crew. The Chechens did not move by flanking maneuvers against the Russians but instead incorporated chess-like maneuvers to hit them. They used buildings and other structures as navigation and signal points for maneuvering or initiating ambushes/assaults against the Russians.



The Chechens only occupied the lower levels of multistory buildings to avoid casualties from rockets and air-delivered munitions coming through the upper levels. One 25-man platoon comprised the “killer team” and set up in three positions along the target avenue. They had responsibility for destroying whatever column entered their site. The other two 25-man platoons set up in the buildings at the assumed entry points to the ambush site. They had responsibility for sealing off the ambush entry escape or interdict efforts to reinforce the ambushed unit.

Chechen “Hugging”



- Stayed close to Russian infantry in urban areas, usually less than 50 meters
- Would rather take chances with infantry than suffer from Russian artillery or air



The Chechens utilized “hugging” techniques to reduce casualties from indirect fires. They would set up positions within 25 to a maximum of 100 meters of Russian positions in order to render Russian artillery and rocket support ineffective.

Chechen Infrastructure



- Relied heavily on stolen, captured, or purchased Russian supplies
- Every 8-man team had a Motorola hand-held radio
- Constructed extensive bunkers throughout the city

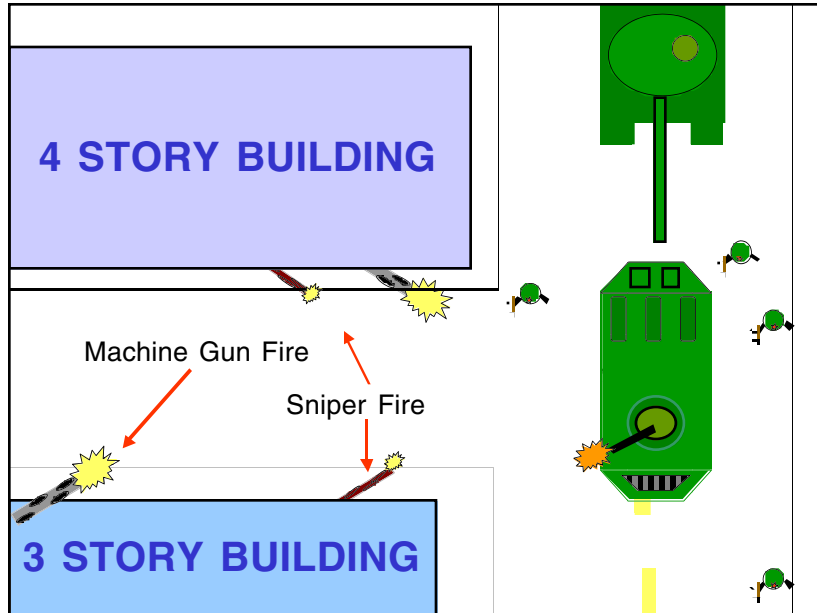
The primary communications device used by the Chechens was a small hand-held Motorola radio. It was used at all levels below “Headquarters” (national equivalent). At this higher level they had access to INMARSAT for communications with the outside world but kept these communications to a minimum because of the monetary cost involved. The Chechens had a ratio of about six combatants to each Motorola radio—but had they been able to afford more radios they would have issued every fighter one during the conduct of urban operations. The Chechens did not use any encryption or separate tactical nets. They maintained communications security by using their native language. Every Chechen could speak Russian but few Russians understood Chechen.

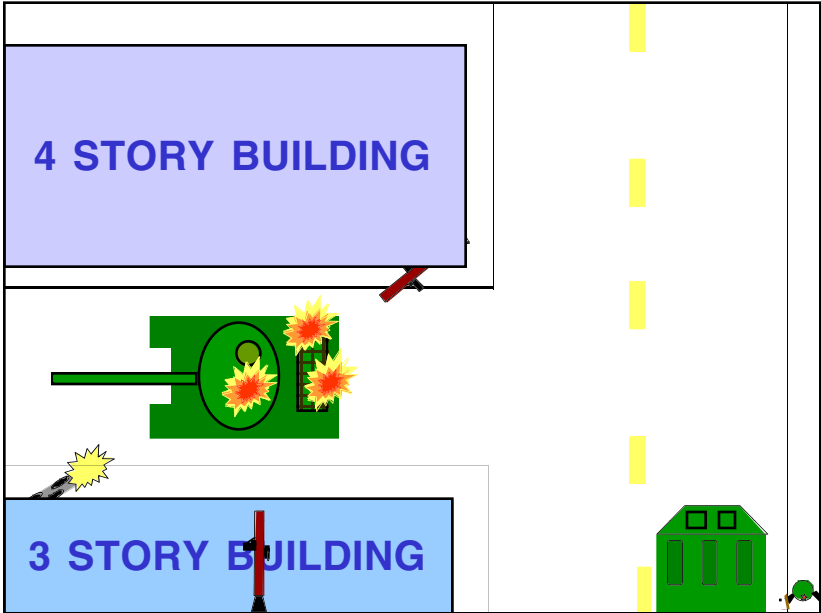
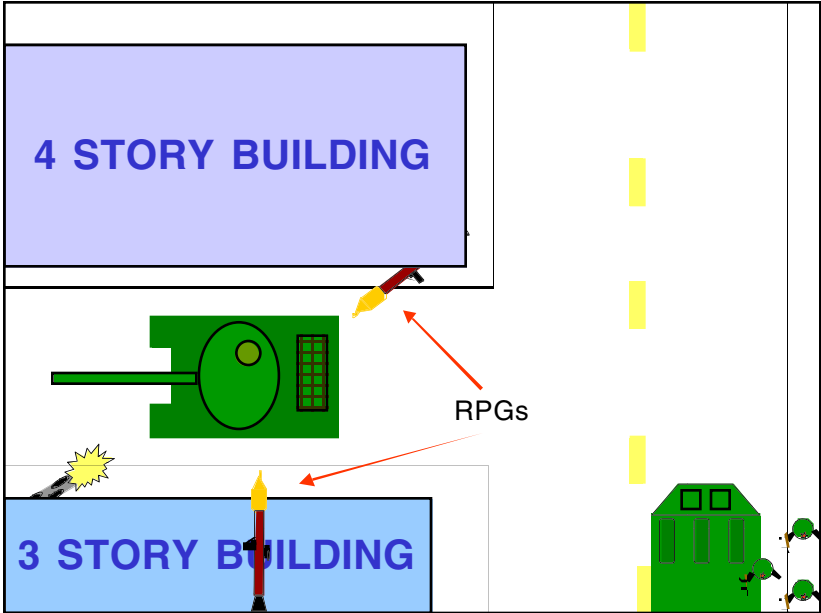
The National Weapon of Chechnya: The RPG



- Widely used in Grozny
- Two dedicated RPG gunners per 8-man team
- Disable first then destroy
- Engaged armor with multiple weapons
- Best RPG gunners 13–16 years old
- Effectiveness greatly increased in urban environment

The standard Russian Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG) warhead needed four rounds on target to penetrate a tank—the Chechens altered the RPG-7 round by removing the detonator cap and increasing the explosive components in such a way that they could penetrate a tank's (to include the T-72) armor and “blow the turret off” in one shot. The Chechens found the RPG to be an extremely effective weapon in urban warfare. Its simple use and wide availability earned it the nickname “The National Weapon of Chechnya.” The Chechens employed the RPG against a wide range of targets, including bunkers, vehicles, personnel, and buildings. The RPG was successfully fired from multiple launchers against Russian armor. The Chechens targeted the thinly armored areas in the rear, top, and sides of Russian vehicles.





Urban Sniping



- Widely used by both sides in Grozny
- Second most deadly urban weapon for the Chechens
- Used as scouts as much as for sniping
- Russians employed in support of infantry; Chechens also deployed independently
- Best source of tactical intelligence in urban area

The most effective Chechen weapon system employed against “pure” Russian infantry was the SVD sniper rifle employed by a trained Chechen sniper. The SVD was not only effective as a casualty producer, but also as a psychological weapon that reduced morale among Russian ground troops. The Russians diverted significant combat power to search for Chechen snipers but were unsuccessful. A major reason for this was that the Chechens had prepared infantry positions to provide supporting/covering fire against Russian forces engaged in countersniper operations.

Chechen Weaknesses



- Internal divisions hindered effort
- Could not conduct an extensive engagement
- Many part-time fighters
- Limited supplies of ammunition
- Could not replace large battlefield losses

Despite tactical success in the streets of Grozny, the Chechens had several weaknesses. The Chechens' greatest weakness was their inability to conduct an extensive engagement. The small size of the Chechen units, coupled with their limited ammunition supplies, caused them to avoid large-scale battles. The Russians discovered that the Chechens could be defeated by forcing the rebels into drawn-out engagements, surrounding their positions, and using overwhelming fire support. The Chechens were unwilling to sustain the level of battlefield losses the Russians experienced and would retreat following a strong Russian counterattack.

The Chechens are a clan-based culture that only bands together to fight foreign invasion. Without a common enemy, the Chechens often turn against each other. The Chechen General Staff did not have complete control over all Chechen forces. Many were independent groups that decided themselves when, where, and how long they would remain in combat. The Russians never learned to successfully exploit these vulnerabilities and simply viewed all Chechens as terrorists.

Chechens with Stingers?



This is an example of possible Chechen deception or information warfare. It was found on a Chechen Web site and shows several Chechens in possession of Stinger anti-aircraft systems. The Chechens may or may not have working Stinger systems, but the possibility of their having them affected the way Russians employed their aircraft during the conflict.

Lessons from Chechnya



- The urban environment leveled the playing field between forces
- Detailed planning was essential
- Prior urban warfare training was critical to battlefield success
- Russians did not understand unique aspects of urban warfare (urban canyon, RPGs, etc.)
- Russians failed to understand cultural aspects

The first thing you must do—and it is priority number one—is study the people. You must know the psychological makeup of not only the combatants you might face but that of the local populace as well. Understand your enemy in detail—but not only from a military and political perspective—but also from a cultural viewpoint. If you underestimate the importance of this, you are on a road to decisive defeat. The Russians—given 400 years of conflict with the Chechens—have not learned this lesson. It is a matter of understanding your foe’s mentality.

Lessons from Chechnya (Cont.)



- The key to victory in the streets of Grozny was the human will to fight
- Troops must be prepared to withstand long periods of intense combat in a chaotic environment with limited resupply or rest
- Technology and equipment were secondary

While it is unlikely the United States will conduct an operation similar to the Russian invasion of Chechnya, there are lessons of value that can be learned. Victory in the streets of Grozny was based on troops' ability to withstand long periods of intense combat with limited resupply and rest. A significant Russian failure was their inability to conduct effective small unit infantry operations in a MOUT environment. While the Russians captured Grozny in January 2000, the city is now unlivable due to the massive destruction caused by Russian artillery.

The battle of Grozny illustrates the type of urban insurgency that may dominate the 21st-century battlefield. Understanding the Chechen strategy, tactics, and weapons is essential in preparing U.S. forces for future urban battles.