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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**URBAN WARFARE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM
THE MARAWI CRISIS**

by

Adolf Ian M. Garceron

June 2020

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Leo J. Blanken
Kalev I. Sepp

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**URBAN WARFARE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM
THE MARAWI CRISIS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS
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ABSTRACT

On May 23, 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) launched an operation against the appointed leader of the terrorist group, ISIS-Philippines. This operation was conducted by the AFP-Joint Special Operation Group (AFP-JSOG), the unit in charge of counterterrorism operations of the AFP, inadvertently starting the five-month-long urban battle against ISIS-Philippines in Marawi City. Subsequently, AFP-JSOG, designated as JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege, has contributed significantly to the clearing of the main battle area from the start to the end of the battle. This thesis used a heuristic single case study and identified the lessons learned that should be considered for the preparation of the AFP in future urban warfare. The lessons learned were generally based on the successes and failures in the operations of JTG-Vector. Ultimately, the recommendations of this study were practical for the improvement of the capability of the AFP in urban warfare. This study produced recommendations for the procurement of additional weapons and equipment that mainly influenced the outcome of JTG-Vector's operations against the terrorists. Also, this study recommended the adoption of TTP developed during the siege that worked against terrorists and proved favorable for the welfare and safety of government forces.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES	1
B.	ISIS-PHILIPPINES	3
C.	OVERVIEW OF MARAWI CITY AND CULTURE OF ITS PEOPLE.....	5
D.	PROBLEM STATEMENT	7
E.	METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH.....	7
II.	OPERATION BINGO	11
A.	INTELLIGENCE FOR OPERATION BINGO.....	11
B.	PLANNING	12
C.	REHEARSAL.....	12
D.	EXECUTION	13
E.	CONCLUSION	22
III.	BATTLE OF BANGGOLO BRIDGE	25
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	25
B.	CONSOLIDATION OF JSOG FORCES TOWARD MARAWI CITY.....	25
C.	PLANNING	26
D.	LINK-UP.....	27
E.	CROSSING OF BANGGOLO BRIDGE.....	32
F.	FA50 BOMB-RUN	34
G.	RESCUE OF TRAPPED CIVILIANS.....	36
H.	CONCLUSION	38
IV.	MAIN BATTLE AREA	41
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	41
B.	BATTLE HANDOVER	42
C.	REORGANIZATION.....	45
D.	JTG-VECTOR	46
E.	BATTLE IN BARANGAY DAGUDUBAN.....	47
F.	DANGER CLOSE.....	51
G.	JSOUS IN DIVIDED SECTOR.....	53
H.	FRAGO NUMBER 4	54
I.	JOURNEY TOWARD SULTAN OMAR DIANALAN BOULEVARD.....	54

J.	CROSSING.....	57
K.	NEW SECTORS	58
L.	ROTATION.....	59
M.	MOVING ON	60
N.	SAFFRULLAH HOSPITAL.....	61
O.	FRAGO 5- JSOTF-TRIDENT.....	62
P.	GRAND MOSQUE-OBJECTIVE GRANDE	62
Q.	LANDBANK BUILDING- BUILDING 633.....	65
R.	BATO MOSQUE	67
S.	CONCLUSION	70
V.	FROM GOMISA AVENUE TO LAKE LANA O	77
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	77
B.	BUILDING 500	77
C.	JSOU2 AND JSOU3’S CROSSING OF GOMISA AVENUE.....	79
D.	WHITE FLAG	80
E.	JTG-VECTOR SECTOR CLEARED	81
F.	CONCLUSION	84
VI.	THE LIBERATION OF MARAWI CITY	87
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	87
B.	PADIAN ALFA	88
C.	NEUTRALIZATION OF ISNILON HAPILON AND OMAR KHAYAM MAUTE	90
D.	PADIAN MOSQUE BLOCK—THE TERRORIST’S LAST STAND	94
E.	CONCLUSION	95
VII.	ANALYSIS	97
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	97
B.	MATERIEL.....	97
C.	TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES.....	101
D.	CONCLUSION	103
VIII.	CONCLUSION	105
A.	PROCUREMENT RECOMMENDATION	105
B.	TTP RECOMMENDATION	106
C.	FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION	106
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	109
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	115

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Sketch of the battle during the raid: Operation Bingo.....	14
Figure 2.	The front of the target building of Operation Bingo.....	15
Figure 3.	The events that followed as a reaction of the terrorists for Operation Bingo.....	19
Figure 4.	The location of troops and terrorists before the link-up.	28
Figure 5.	The location of troops and terrorists’ stronghold at eastern side of the river.	35
Figure 6.	New mission of JTG-SOF.....	41
Figure 7.	Sectors of JTG-Vector and TGP “B.”.....	43
Figure 8.	Location of troops in Barangay Daguduban as of July 9, 2017.....	48
Figure 9.	JTG-Vector concept of operation for clearing of Grand Mosque.....	63
Figure 10.	2SRB sketch in seizure of Objective 500.	79
Figure 11.	The remaining terrorist-controlled area as of September 30, 2017.	82
Figure 12.	The concept of operation of JTG-Vector in the final phase of clearing the sector.	83
Figure 13.	JTG-Vector concept of operations to support JTG-Musang.....	88
Figure 14.	Movement of JTG-Vector forces and 3SRB.....	90
Figure 15.	Sniper team’s location and the bodies of the two terrorist leaders.	93

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	After Activity Review
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AO	Area of Operation
CAS	Close Air Support
CMO	Civil Military Operations
CO	Commanding Officer
CRG	Crisis Response Group
DRC	Division Reconnaissance Company
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
FPOL	forward passage of line
FRAGO	fragmentary order
IB	Infantry Battalion
IED	improvised explosive devise
JSOG	Joint Special Operations Group
JSOU	Joint Special Operations Unit
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTG	Joint Task Group
MBA	Main Battle Area
MIC	Mechanized Infantry Company
PNP	Philippine National Police
LRC	Light Reaction Company
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade

RPSB	Regional Public Safety Battalion
SAF	Special Action Force
SFOC	Special Forces Operations Course
SBF	Support-by-Fire
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SRB	Scout Ranger Battalion
SRC	Scout Ranger Company
SSTU	SOCOM Sniper Task Unit
TCP	Tactical Command Post
TGP	Task Group Panther
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Marawi siege is the most significant urban battle the Philippine security forces has fought in recent history. It took the national security forces months to defeat the terrorist group ISIS-Philippines in the central business district of Marawi City. Even though the terrorists were defeated in Marawi, the threat of terrorists to urban areas still exists. Given the threat of terrorists to urban areas, how can the Armed Forces of the Philippines improve its urban warfare capabilities to face the existing threat of the terrorists?

This thesis used a heuristics case study and narrated the operations conducted by JTG-Vector in five separate chapters. The lessons learned were determined from successes and failures in the operations at the end of each operation chapter. Then, the identified lessons learned were analyzed in comparison to the doctrine and field manual on how the U.S. military conducted their urban operations.

This thesis recommended the procurement of weapons and equipment, particularly M2 .50 caliber machineguns, tear gas and gas masks, quadcopter drones, and armored vests that were proven to be effective in fighting the terrorists in Marawi City. Also, this thesis recommended the procurement of additional protection features for armored vehicles that would enhance the survivability of the troops inside armored vehicles while fighting in a close battle.

This thesis recommended the adoption of TTP developed by JTG-Vector developed during the five-month-long battle. Also, this thesis recommended the development of AFP's doctrine in urban warfare based on the lessons learned of JTG-Vector and the integration of the weapons and equipment available in the inventory of the AFP.

The Marawi siege brought an excellent case worth studying for urban warfare. This thesis recommended further study on the higher level of command and other joint task groups who were involved in operations during Marawi siege. A new study was also recommended for more advanced and sophisticated weapons and equipment that may be effective in urban warfare that was available in the market. Lastly, this thesis recommended the study for the development of quadcopter drones sturdy enough to survive the urban

environment. The AFP should consider these recommendations for the improvement of its capability in future urban warfare.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the omnipotent God for divine assistance. To the members of the Philippine government security forces who have fought and are still fighting terrorists in other parts of the Philippines, to those who have met their fate, and those who were wounded during Marawi siege: your sacrifices have become the source of my strength to study our operations. May this case study provide lessons to help improve AFP's urban fighting capabilities to fight terrorists in our beloved country. To everyone, thank you very much.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES

United States Marine General Charles Krulak once said, “The future is not the son of Desert Storm, but the stepchild of Somalia and Chechnya.”¹ General Krulak was referring to the battles fought in built-up areas or cities of Somalia and Chechnya. Urban warfare was conducted in Mogadishu City in Somalia where 17 American soldiers were killed in action and about 1,500 Somalis were either killed, wounded, arrested or went missing.² In Chechnya, Russian soldiers fought in Grozny City against the secessionist Chechen forces where the Russians suffered numerous casualties before capturing and controlling the city.³ The prediction of General Krulak translated into reality as the number of fights in urban areas continues to grow all over the world. The Philippines was not excluded from the list.

The urban areas in Mindanao were the most threatened by terror attacks in the Philippines. Of the 145 cities in the country, 33 are in Mindanao.⁴ Almost all of these cities have experienced terrorist bombings. The country experienced urban battles twice in recent history. The first was a 19-day conflict in Zamboanga City in 2013 during which more than 200 people were killed, including 23 soldiers, 183 Moro National Liberation Front rebels, and 12 civilians.⁵ It was followed by the battle of Marawi City, which is the subject of this

¹ David Kilcullen, “Preface to ‘Blood and Concrete,’” in *Blood and Concrete: 21st Century Conflict in Urban Centers and Megacities* (San Bernardino, CA: Small Wars Foundation, 2018), xxxi.

² Michael Marra and William Pierce, “Somalia 20 Years Later-Lessons Learned, Re-Learned and Forgotten,” in *Blood and Concrete: 21st Century Conflict in Urban Centers and Megacities* (San Bernardino, CA: Small Wars Foundation, 2019), 136.

³ Lester W. Grau, *Russian Urban Tactics: Lessons from the Battle for Grozny* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2001), 1.

⁴ League of Cities of the Philippines, “League of Cities of the Philippines,” accessed January 8, 2020, <http://www.lcp.org.ph/47/mindanao>.

⁵ Alan Taylor, “Bloody Philippine Siege Brought to an End,” *The Atlantic*, September 30, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/09/bloody-philippine-siege-brought-to-an-end/100599/>.

research. The threat of such conflicts will continue since many terrorist groups still operate in the country.

The Philippines has confronted terrorist threats from different groups for decades. One espouses communist ideology while others promote religious beliefs. Government forces have fought these terrorists in the jungles all over the archipelago. There were two instances in which these terrorists attacked urban areas. In these two occasions of urban attacks, however victorious, it was huge challenge for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to deal with the terrorists and clear the city from the control of the terrorists. The realization of its weaknesses and shortcomings came only when the attacks were underway. These attacks posed a challenge because the terrorists acquired new tactics, techniques and procedures and improved their capabilities. The latest attack was in Marawi City with greater magnitude and newer technology and different TTPs.

Why is the study of the urban operations of Joint Special Operations Group (JSOG) forces during the battle of Marawi important? In the battle of Marawi City, JSOG was given major roles in neutralizing the threats and clearing the city from the clutches of terrorism. An in-depth study of the operations conducted by the JSOG during the Marawi crisis will benefit the AFP's preparation for future urban threats in the Philippines. The close scrutiny of what happened during the operations of JSOG brings important lessons that will be digested and form the basis for the preparation of the AFP for future urban terrorist threats. The preparation for urban warfare is necessary because of the likelihood of urban terrorist attack in the Philippines in the future.

JSOG as the primary unit in counterterrorism were deployed in all large-scale AFP operations against the ISIS-Philippines in the jungle and urban areas of Lanao Del Sur. The unit that started and preempted the attack in Marawi City were JSOG forces. JSOG also has the authority of employing the Light Reaction Companies, Naval Special Operations Unit-8 and Philippine Forward Air Controller teams from 22nd Special Operation Squadron. These units had been trained and regularly conducted training exercises in urban fighting.

During the crisis, JSOG forces were reinforced by the Special Action Force from the Philippine National Police, which added to the capability of the JSOG forces. The higher headquarters further enhanced the ability of the JSOG by assigning two Scout Ranger Battalions of the Philippine Army and one Regional Public Safety Battalion from the Philippine National Police. One Light Armor Company and Psychological Operations Team supported the JSOG as well throughout the campaign. Students of the Special Forces Operations Course who were on a test mission were also assigned to JSOG and contributed significantly during the campaign.

Aside from fighting the terrorists, JSOG elements were also tasked to conduct crash courses in Close Quarter Battle (CQB) for newly arrived units in order to improve their capability in urban combat before they fight in Marawi City. There were three sectors within the Main Battle Area (MBA) in Marawi City during the crisis. The JSOG forces had the task of clearing one sector. There were instances in which JSOG forces were called to help in the other sectors. This gave the JSOG troops the experience of fighting in all the sectors inside the MBA.

The nature, tasks, and organizational composition of the JSOG in their operations during the Marawi crisis provide sufficient literature for a case study in urban warfare. The Armed Forces of the Philippines can base its preparation for future urban operations from the experiences of the JSOG forces.

B. ISIS-PHILIPPINES

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East has planned the spread of their caliphate through South East Asia.⁶ It has influenced terrorist groups in the Philippines because of current security instability in the country. ISIS has seen an opening for the declaration of *wilayat* in the Southern Philippines due to the prevailing security situation in the area.⁷

⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, "The Emerging Wilayat in the Philippines," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 5 (2016): 22.

⁷ Gunaratna, 22.

Wilayat was the concept introduced by the Ottoman Empire during the spread of its influence outside its empire through Europe and Asia.⁸ The Ottoman Empire claimed *wilayat* as their external territories with the function of representing the central control administration of the empire. ISIS imitated the concept with its caliphate needing to establish *wilayat* for the expansion of its influence across the globe.

The declaration of a caliphate in Mosul gathered immediate support from the Philippines.⁹ A group of high-risk offenders in one prison, Abu Sayaff Group-Basilan (ASG-Basilan) under Isnilon Hapilon, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF), Ansarul Khilafa Philippines (AKP), Maute Group and some locals of Marawi City successively pledged allegiance to Abu Bakar Al- Baghdadi. These groups bound together to form Da'wahtul Islamiyah Waliyatul Mashriq (DIWM) or Islamic State in Eastern Asia Region under the leadership of Isnilon Hapilon.¹⁰ These groups were responsible for the attack in Marawi City aiming to establish a *Wilayat* or ISIS province in East Asia. These groups have separate origins and backgrounds.

Since 1997, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has spread terror and made terrorism a lucrative source of income in the southern Philippines. The ASG has looted and massacred in towns of the Zamboanga and Basilan Provinces. They conducted raids in resorts in Malaysia and the Philippines to kidnap unwary tourists for ransom. Isnilon Hapilon, who eventually rose and became the Emir of ISIS in Southeast Asia, is a leader of the ASG-Basilan group.¹¹

In 2012, Khalifa Islamiah Mindanao (KIM) or commonly known as Maute Group was organized to establish an Islamic State Caliphate in Mindanao. The Maute Brothers, Abdullah, and Omarkhayyam formed the group, and most of its sub-leaders were the

⁸ Rohan Gunaratna and Natasha Hornell-Scott, "The Islamic State Wilayats & Global Expansion," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 8 (2016): 3.

⁹ IPAC, "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," *Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict*, no. 38 (July 21, 2017): 1.

¹⁰ Edwin Enriquez Amadar and Robert W Tuttle, "The Emergence of ISIS in the Philippines" (master's thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 1, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/59634>.

¹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)" (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Armed Forces of the Philippines, November 27, 2017), 2.

relatives of the powerful Maute and Romato clans. This group became notorious in spreading terror in Lanao Del Sur and Lanao Del Norte. Their terrorist acts included the attack on the Lanao Del Sur Provincial Jail to rescue their members, the attack on the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology facility in Kidapawan City to save their members and rogue members of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).¹² The Maute Group was the largest group that joined ISIS.

The other groups that pledged allegiance to ISIS were the BIFF-Torayfe faction, under Esmail Abdul Malik from Maguindanao Province; the AKP under Mohammad Jaafar Maguid based in Sarangani Province; and the ASG-Sulu Amar Faction led by alias Abu Amar based in Sulu.¹³

C. OVERVIEW OF MARAWI CITY AND CULTURE OF ITS PEOPLE

Marawi City is situated on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines.¹⁴ It has a land area of 33.8 square miles and is elevated above mean sea level by 2,348 feet.¹⁵ It has 96 barangays. It is bounded on the north by the municipalities of Kapai and Sagiaran, on the south by Lanao Lake, on the east by Bubong and Ramin-Ditsaan and on the west by municipalities of Marantao and Saguian. The city is geographically divided by the Agus River.¹⁶

¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2.

¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

¹⁴ Maxine Betteridge-Moes, "What Happened in Marawi?," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/happened-marawi-171029085314348.html>.

¹⁵ PhilAtlas, "Marawi City, Lanao Del Sur Profile—PhilAtlas," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.philatlas.com/mindanao/armm/lanao-del-sur/marawi.html>.

¹⁶ PhilGIS, "Marawi City | PhilGIS," accessed January 11, 2020, <http://philgis.org/city-and-capital-page/marawi-city>.

Marawi City is the only Islamic city in the Philippines.¹⁷ It was originally named Dansalan City and later renamed Marawi City by virtue of Republic Act 1552 in 1956.¹⁸ It is the capital of Lanao del Sur with a population of 201,785, as of 2015, according to the Census of Population.¹⁹ Its population is over 90 percent Muslim and the city is considered the center of Islam in the Philippines.²⁰ Muslim moral standards are integrated into the laws of Marawi City, as exemplified by the prohibition of alcohol, gambling, pork selling, and karaoke clubs; hijabs must be worn by Muslim women in public.²¹

Marawi city is inhabited by the Maranao ethnic group. The name Maranao which means “People of the Lake” is derived from Lanao, which is the name of the usual territory surrounding the lake.²² Maranao is the largest Islamic ethnic group in the Philippines who traditionally dwell in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur in Mindanao.²³ The Maranao has a culture of violence called *rido*.²⁴

Rido is the term used by the Maranao for a family feud.²⁵ It is described as violence caused by revenge or retaliation between families or communities in places where injustice and insecurity are perceived. It is a chain of act of revenge for perception of or actual

¹⁷ Carmel Crimmins, “Philippines’ Islamic City Proud to Be Different,” *Reuters*, March 17, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-islam-idUSMAN19616320080317>.

¹⁸ Ver F. Pacete, “Understanding the Culture of War in Marawi,” *Sunstar*, June 20, 2017, 1, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/148594>.

¹⁹ Noronisa Macadadaya, “Age and Sex Structure of Marawi City (Based on the Results of 2015 Census of Population) | Philippine Statistics Authority—ARMM,” accessed January 11, 2020, <http://rsoarimm.psa.gov.ph/release/new-article/55328>.

²⁰ Rough Guides, “Marawi and Lake Lanao,” *Rough Guides*, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/asia/philippines/mindanao/autonomous-region-muslim-mindanao/marawi-lake-lanao/>.

²¹ Crimmins, “Philippines’ Islamic City Proud to Be Different.”

²² Ethnic Group of the Philippines, “Maranao | Ethnic Groups of the Philippines,” accessed January 11, 2020, <http://www.ethnicgroupsofphilippines.com/people/ethnic-groups-in-the-philippines/maranao/>.

²³ Ethnic Group of the Philippines.

²⁴ Gaudencio M. Alaya-Ay, Jr. et al., “Rido Culture: Its Impact to the Maranaos’ Contemporary Educational Aspirations,” *IAMURE International Journal of Education* 7, no. 1 (November 3, 2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.7718/iamure.ije.v7i1.557>.

²⁵ Alaya-Ay, Jr. et al., 1.

injustice.²⁶ The people who are involved in *rido* always suffer from insecurity thus they procure weapons for protection.²⁷ This cycle of violence between families and communities not connected with terrorism, compelled the residents of Marawi City to build their homes and commercial establishments with reinforced concrete.²⁸

Marawi City was an attractive target for ISIS-Philippines to attack, capture and occupy. The city is well-suited for the conduct of prolonged urban warfare.²⁹ Its built-up areas were ready for urban battles even before the occupation of ISIS-Philippines. The residents realized the benefits of building fortified houses due to decades' culture of *rido*. Residents in Marawi City built houses with reinforced walls where the concrete is poured. In addition, it is common to the residents of Marawi City to store guns and ammunition as family treasure. ISIS-Philippines took advantage of the fortified buildings and supplies of guns and ammunition during the siege.³⁰

D. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given the threat of terrorists to urban areas, how can the Armed Forces of the Philippines improve its urban warfare capabilities to face the existing threat of the terrorists?

E. METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH

This research used the heuristic case study method to identify lessons learned that should be considered for the preparation of the AFP in future urban warfare: “Heuristic case studies inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal

²⁶ The New Humanitarian, “Vendettas and Violence on Mindanao—Analysis,” The New Humanitarian, June 24, 2009, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/84979/philippines-vendettas-and-violence-mindanao-analysis>.

²⁷ Alaya-Ay, Jr. et al., “Rido Culture,” 7.

²⁸ Joseph Franco, “Marawi: Winning the War After the Battle,” November 29, 2017, <https://icct.nl/publication/marawi-winning-the-war-after-the-battle/>.

²⁹ “Freedom Comes to Marawi After the Defeat of the Islamic State—AIIA,” *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (blog), accessed January 12, 2020, <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/freedom-marawi-defeat-islamic-state/>.

³⁰ “Freedom Comes to Marawi After the Defeat of the Islamic State—AIIA.”

paths.”³¹ Such a qualitative method has been selected as it allows for both the production of rigorous descriptive inference regarding the Marawi siege, as well as a systematic analysis of the case for the proposal of future research on the topic of urban operations.³²

This research will describe the narrative of the operations of the JSOG forces during the Marawi crisis. The first phase will be a narrative of the raid that triggered the start of the Marawi crisis. The second phase will be a narrative of the JSOG forces in their attempt to rescue the crew of the light armor vehicles trapped inside the main battle area (MBA), and their role in securing the safe corridor for civilians released by the terrorists. The third phase will be a narrative of the redeployment of the JSOG to the MBA to clear houses and buildings in its assigned sector from Brgy Tolali, Marawi City, until the clearing of the Grand Mosque and Bato Mosque. The fourth phase will be a narrative of clearing of buildings and houses from Gomisa Avenue toward the Lanao Lake, which is the end of the clearing of JSOG sector. The last phase will be a narrative of the operation of the JSOG in neutralizing the leaders of ISIS-Philippines, the rescue of the remaining hostages and subsequent clearing of the final objective in Marawi City. In describing the narrative of the operations of JSOG forces during Marawi crisis, I will impart my personal experiences and observations as the commander of Joint Special Operations Unit 3, in addition to the information I have gathered from exhaustive research of extant sources.

Each phase will be analyzed comprehensively. The description of each phase will tackle the critical events: the tactics techniques and procedures (TTP) employed by the operators; the weapons used; the joint, combined and interagency cooperation; and the support provided by the Light Armor Company and Psychological Operations Teams. The study will find lessons from each phase, point out differences in the TTP of each unit in clearing houses and buildings, analyze how TTP improved as the clearing of the sector proceeded. In analyzing, the lessons learned from operations during the Marawi siege will be compared to the doctrine of U.S. Armed Forces as a baseline for recommendations.

³¹Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: John F Kennedy School of Government, 2005), 75.

³²Gary King, Robert O Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Lastly, the study will offer recommendations to improve the fighting capability of the AFP in urban warfare.

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II. OPERATION BINGO

On May 23, 2017, Joint Task Force Zampelan (JTF-Zampelan) launched Operation Bingo to neutralize Isnilon Hapilon, the appointed leader of ISIS in South East Asia.³³ JTF-Zampelan tasked Joint Special Operations Unit 3 (JSOU3) to spearhead the raid and serve the arrest warrant to the emir at his safe house. This operation started the Marawi siege as the terrorists reacted by attacking significant targets in the city and occupying city streets while carrying weapons and waving the ISIS flag.³⁴

This chapter will narrate the raid that triggered the start of the Marawi crisis. The first three parts detail the preparation of Operation Bingo, from the briefing of intelligence, to planning, and to rehearsals. The last part is the execution of the operation and the events that started the escalation of the chaos into the five-month-long crisis.

A. INTELLIGENCE FOR OPERATION BINGO

The Naval Intelligence and Security Group-Western Mindanao (NISG-WM) provided an intelligence report regarding the location of the top leader of the ISIS-Philippine, which was presented to the commander of the 1st Infantry Division.³⁵ The report indicated that Isnilon Hapilon was reported to be in the vicinity of Barangay Basak Malutlut, Marawi City. However, the information provided was limited and short of essential information needed by the commander for the operation. The intelligence only provided the location of the target leader, and there were at least ten terrorists with him. Then, the intelligence used a satellite image from Google Maps to show the presumed location of the target house.³⁶

³³Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 4.

³⁴“The War in Marawi: 153 Days and More,” Rappler, accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/186075-marawi-series-rappler-timeline>.

³⁵Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 4.

³⁶Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

The intelligence mentioned that the target frequently moves, and the target might move from the location at any time.³⁷ Moreover, the intelligence reported that the building the terrorist occupied had a concrete fence with a black steel gate.³⁸ Further, there were terrorist sympathizers living in the vicinity of the target building. Lastly, there were CCTV cameras installed at the gate and along the street in front of the apartment.³⁹

B. PLANNING

The commander of the 1st Infantry Division presided over the planning of Operation Bingo in the headquarters of the 2nd Mechanized Brigade in Iligan City.⁴⁰ The commander tasked JSOU3 to plan and conduct the operation against Isnilon Hapilon. The plan for Operation Bingo was made hastily due to reports that the target might move from the area soon. The intelligence reported that the target was always on the move, and seldom stayed in one place for an extended period. The plan was to serve an arrest warrant against the said high-value individual at 0800H on May 23, 2017. But, the scheduled operation was delayed for hours because of other intelligence requirements of JSOU3 planners.⁴¹

C. REHEARSAL

At 0930H, information came in that the target leader had already left the presumed location given by the informant.⁴² But the troops continued to conduct rehearsals in anticipation of the pending operation. Then, some details were corrected, and an additional vehicle was provided for transportation. Next, at 1300H, the commander of the 4LRC and Intelligence officer from NISG-WM conducted reconnaissance to ensure that the troops serve the warrant of arrest at the right door of the apartment complex. Additional revisions

³⁷Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

³⁸Naval Intelligence and Security Group, “Target Packet ‘Bingo’” (Target Packet Presentation, Iligan City, Philippines, May 23, 2017), 20.

³⁹Naval Intelligence and Security Group, “Target Packet ‘Bingo.’”

⁴⁰Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 4.

⁴¹Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

⁴²Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Oplan Bingo’” (Quezon City, Philippines: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, May 2017), 2.

were made regarding the plan after the reconnaissance. The commander of 4LRC gave a final briefing to all the raiding elements. All involved in the operation prayed together. After the prayers, all forces involved boarded their respective vehicles and waited for 1400H, the H-Hour.⁴³

D. EXECUTION

The operating troops left Camp Ranao at about 1400H.⁴⁴ They were composed of assault elements from 4LRC, NAVSOU8, and PFAC team and the support elements from 4SRC, 14DRC, and 51MIC. The 4th Light Reaction Company (4LRC) with a platoon from Naval Special Operations Unit 8 (NAVSOU8) reached the target building at 1418H (Figure 1). The 4Scout Ranger Company (4SRC) tasked as blocking elements from the east and 14Division Reconnaissance Company (14DRC) tasked as blocking from the south of the target building proceeded to their respective assigned position to prevent the escape of the terrorists. The 51st Mechanized Infantry Company (51MIC) was also tasked to support the operation with armored vehicles to prevent the terrorists' reinforcements and to provide casualty evacuation vehicle.⁴⁵

⁴³Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2.

⁴⁴Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2.

⁴⁵Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

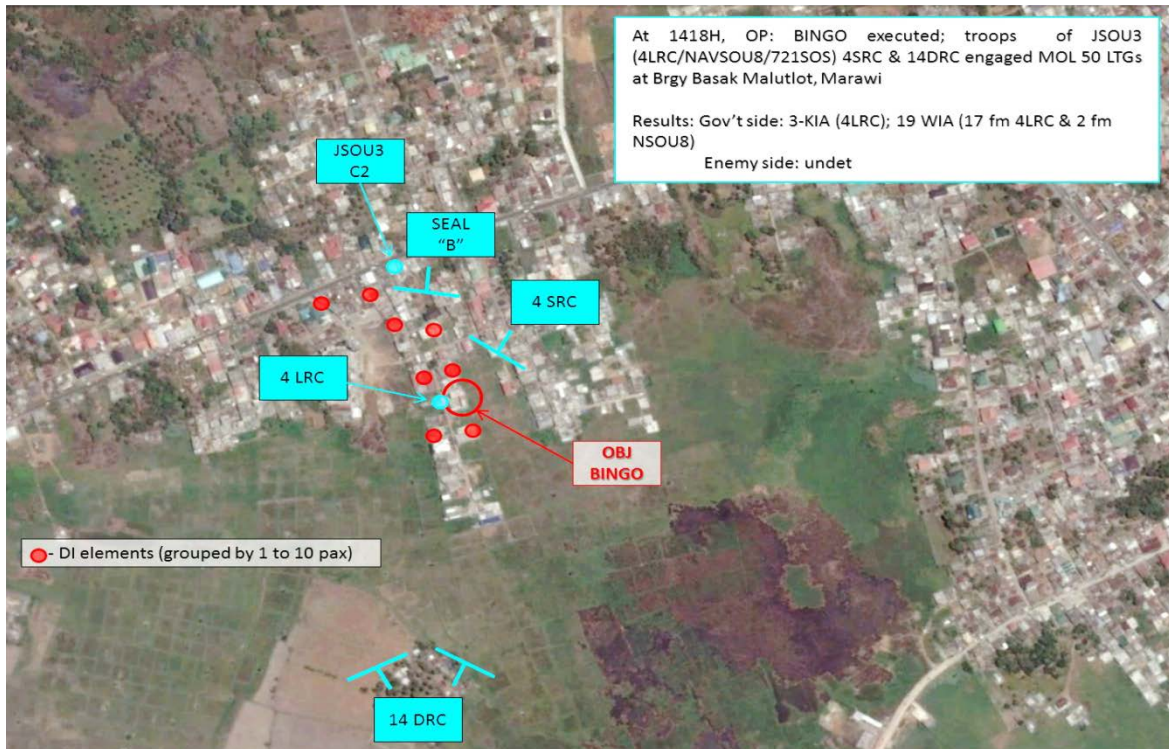


Figure 1. Sketch of the battle during the raid: Operation Bingo.⁴⁶

The assaulters entered the safe house as planned and found one M16 rifle on the first floor of the apartment unit.⁴⁷ Then, terrorist fire wounded three of the raiding elements with two fatal and one serious injury. The troops realized that the layout of the apartment was different from the description given by the intelligence unit.⁴⁸

The asset described the apartment unit as a two-story apartment with one-way-in, one-way-out unit, which meant that the front door was the only means of access and egress.⁴⁹ However, the apartment complex had four gates (Figure 2).⁵⁰ The first gate was the access to the common area of the apartment complex, to the back doors of the two-

⁴⁶ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 9.

⁴⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Oplan Bingo,’” 3.

⁴⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

⁴⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 1.

⁵⁰ Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

story apartment units and to the studio type units. The other three gates are the front accesses of each of the three two-story apartment units. The studio type units were located at the back. The common area serves as alternate access for all units in the apartment complex.⁵¹ The terrorist used the common area to maneuver from one unit to another.⁵² The terrorist used the units at the back to hide during the firefight,⁵³



Figure 2. The front of the target building of Operation Bingo.⁵⁴

⁵¹ The place was also upon inspected by the author after the raid.

⁵² Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

⁵³ Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

⁵⁴ Source: Martin Petty, "Copies of Koran, Boots and Scarves All That Remain in Philippine Rebel Leader's Lair," *Reuters*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/philippines-militants-hideout-idINKBN1CW1PF>.

The stack leader of the assaulters who were inside the target building took the initiative and secured the door from where the enemy fire was coming.⁵⁵ While doing so, he neutralized three of the terrorists. According to the Commanding Officer (CO) of 4LRC, it was the stack leader who prevented the terrorists from overrunning the troops inside the target apartment unit.⁵⁶ Then, the terrorists used the second floor of the apartment unit to throw pipe bombs to the location of the troops. After the operation, the troops recounted that they were lucky as the pipe bombs thrown at them did not explode. The CO continued that the soldiers who were inside the apartment were trapped since they would not leave their wounded comrades. Those who were not hurt administered first aid to the injured. Then, the stack leader requested the company medic for those seriously wounded. He also organized other troops in defending their position. The CO of 4LRC requested an armored vehicle to extract the seriously injured soldiers who needed emergency care.⁵⁷ The company medics of 4LRC and NAVSOU8 tried to go inside the apartment to provide tactical combat casualty care but were prevented by the heavy terrorist fire.⁵⁸ At this time the situation worsened because all of the units involved were already engaged in the firefight, including the blocking forces.

The 4SRC troops, while moving toward their designated blocking position also came under fire from suspected security elements of Isnilon Hapilon.⁵⁹ Then, 4SRC troops were forced to hold their position while assessing the situation. Suppressive fire was delivered by M60 gunner toward the building occupied by the terrorists while other members of 4SRC moved to clear the building. The enemy fled, the building was eventually cleared, and the 4SRC troops were reorganized by their CO to continue performing their task and support the raiding elements.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Oplan Bingo,'" 3.

⁵⁶ Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

⁵⁷ Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

⁵⁸ 4LRC and NAVSOU8, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017

⁵⁹ Philippine Army, "After Battle Report" (Camp Ranao, Marawi City: 4rt Scout Ranger Company, October 15, 2017).

⁶⁰ Philippine Army.

14DRC troops fought an undetermined number of enemies in their sector. Six were already wounded while they were defending their sector.⁶¹ The Alpha Company of 65th Infantry Battalion, who were sent to reinforce the raiding elements, were prevented by the enemy from moving toward the location of the area of Barangay Basak Malutlut. 51MIC also came under fire along the main road. The situation was getting out of hand. The number of enemies kept growing and engaged all government troops involved in the operation from all directions. The Commander of JSOU3 asked permission from higher headquarters to utilize his reserve for the purpose of regaining the initiative and extracting the casualties. Upon approval, the commander went in with the reserve to personally assess the situation in front and to expedite the extraction of the wounded.

The convoy of the reserve left Camp Ranao to reinforce the raiding elements pinned down in the vicinity of the objective building.⁶² Terrorists ambushed the convoy of the reserve force, hitting three troops of the reserve force. The reserve force reached the blocking forces and occupied buildings for cover just two hundred meters from the location of the raiding elements. The reserve was pinned down by enemy sniper fire, preventing them from moving toward the location of the raiding elements. The three wounded personnel of the reserve force were immediately evacuated after medics provided them with initial medical treatment.

The raiding elements occupied some houses for defensive positions and casualty collection points.⁶³ The situation of the raiding elements worsened when the two armored vehicles that were intended for the evacuation of the seriously wounded were jammed in between fences in front of the target apartment unit while maneuvering. One of vehicles, being the security element, moved ahead of the vehicle that would pick up the wounded. The second vehicle maneuvered so that the rear doors would be closer to the wounded troops for easier and safer loading. However, the width of the road was about 5.75

⁶¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Oplan Bingo,'" 4.

⁶² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

⁶³ Commanding Officer of 4th Light Reaction Company, After Activity Review, May 26, 2017.

meters.⁶⁴ The length of the armored vehicle was 5.35 meters.⁶⁵ Instead of evacuating the wounded, the stuck armored vehicle provided suppressive fire toward the second floor of the apartment to prevent the terrorists from dropping pipe bombs and from delivering effective fire toward the position of the troops. The armored vehicle refrained from shooting the first floor of the other apartment units because troops heard the voices of women and children trapped inside their homes. The vehicle commander requested for a track armored vehicle (M113) to push them so that they could move. However, the M113 right track fell into the earth portion of the road and its belly touched the concrete. The M113 also got stuck.

I observed that the situation in the area was stalemated. All units involved were forced to seek cover inside the buildings in the vicinity for safety before dark. The government forces turned from offensive to defensive. The enemies knew the area better than the government forces. They knew where to maneuver to outflank the government forces. The defensive posture taken by the government forces was in anticipation of a possible enemy swarming attack against isolated troops as the sun was setting.

Meanwhile, terrorists answered the government forces' operation by occupying the Amai Pakpak Medical Center (APMC) in the Marawi City proper (Figure 3).⁶⁶ They also attacked the Police Station and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) in Marawi City. They burned the Our Lady of Help Cathedral, Senator Ninoy Aquino Foundation, Dansalan College, and the Filipino-Libyan Friendship Hospital. They captured the detachment of 51st Infantry Battalion stationed inside Marawi City where they killed at least six soldiers.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ "Marawi City Map," Google Maps, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/7.993158,124.2836291/Marawi+City,+Lanao+del+Sur,+Philippines/@8.0009546,124.2743908,102m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m9!4m8!1m0!1m5!1m1!1s0x32559173e462e30f:0x9befb54ef959f073!2m2!1d124.297718!2d8.0106213!3e3>.

⁶⁵ Military-Today, "Simba Armored Personnel Carrier," accessed January 21, 2020, <http://www.military-today.com/apc/simba.htm>.

⁶⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 7.

⁶⁷ "Inspiring Story of Soldier in Marawi Goes Viral," TODAY online, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/inspiring-story-soldier-marawi-goes-viral>.

JTF-Zampelan sent two armored vehicles to reinforce the policemen and the personnel of BJMP being attacked by the terrorists.⁶⁸ However, these armored vehicles were ambushed and pinned down in Barangay Marinaut, Marawi City. (Figure 3)

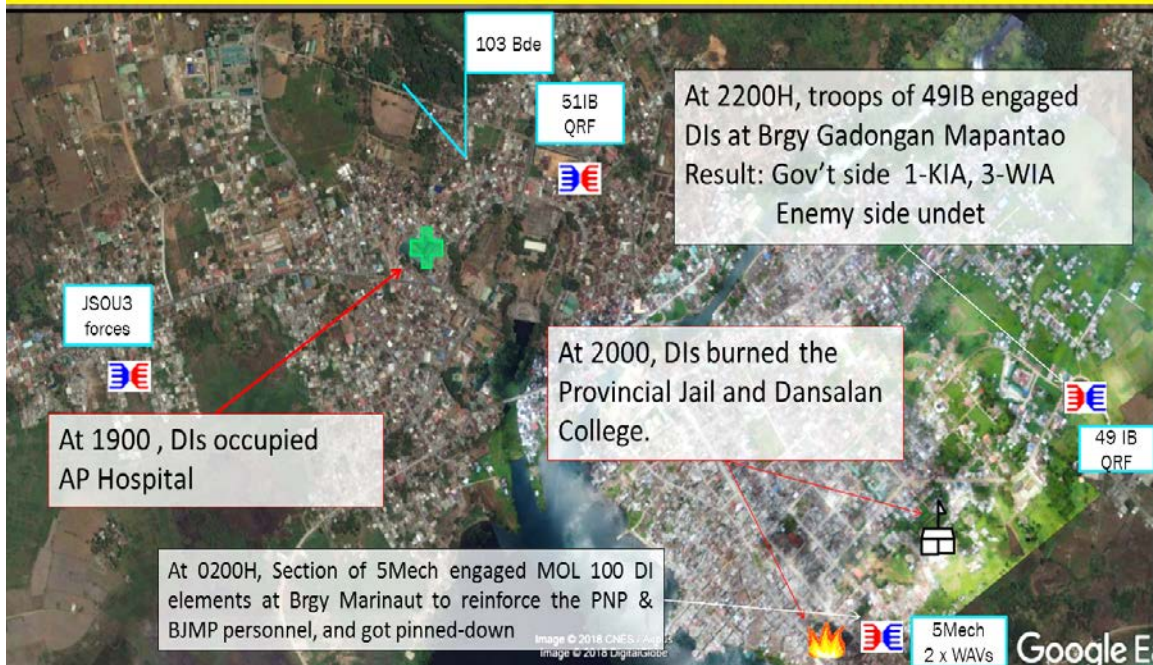


Figure 3. The events that followed as a reaction of the terrorists for Operation Bingo.⁶⁹

The fighting continued for the whole night for all government forces in Marawi City. Early in the evening, a convoy of Special Action Force (SAF) of Philippine National Police (PNP) communicated that they will pass through the road where the ambush of the reserve forces happened the night before.⁷⁰ There was a firefight between government forces and terrorists along that road. Due to miscommunication, no warning reached the SAF troopers. They passed through and were ambushed by the terrorists exactly where the

⁶⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 7.

⁶⁹ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

⁷⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Oplan Bingo,’” 5.

earlier ambush happened. One of their vehicles was destroyed while the other was lost along the way. It was later captured and burned by the terrorists.⁷¹

Just after midnight, blocking elements of 4SRC clashed with a group of terrorists. They neutralized one of the terrorists while the others escaped and sought safety inside the houses in the vicinity.⁷²

The following day, the terrorists diverted the concentration of their efforts towards the two armored vehicles in Barangay Marinaut. The firefight between the pinned down crew of the armored vehicle and the terrorists intensified. The air support that JSOU3 requested for softening their target was diverted to support them.⁷³ The higher headquarters organized reinforcements to rescue them.

Most of the terrorists went to what became the MBA, hence, easing the pressure on the raiding elements. The Alpha Company troops from 65th Infantry Battalion (IB) who were supposed to link-up with the raiding elements the night before were able to move.⁷⁴ However, they were fired upon by terrorists when they are about 20 meters away from the location of JSOU3 command group. The terrorists inflicted one casualty. After that, fire coming from the terrorists against the raiding elements lessened further.

By mid-afternoon, the command group upon sensing the lull in fighting, took the chance to link-up with the raiding elements.⁷⁵ Then the raiding elements, composed of 4LRC and NAVSOU8, cleared the objective and the whole apartment complex and found a hole in the wall that was used by the terrorists to escape. The raiding teams searched the whole complex and found weapons and documents with high intelligence value. The computer hard drive that was recovered contained the video of the planning conducted by

⁷¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

⁷² Philippine Army, "After Battle Report," 4.

⁷³ "Softening" is the same to the military term saturation fire. The choice of word "softening" was based on the term used by Filipino soldiers during Marawi Siege when subjecting their targets to a heavy volume of machine-gun fire, and occasional mortar and CAS fire.

⁷⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Oplan Bingo,'" 5.

⁷⁵ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

the terrorists regarding their attack in Marawi City. The video was later used to justify the declaration of martial law in Mindanao.⁷⁶ The search was over late in the afternoon.

The raiding elements were unable to leave the area after clearing of the target building due to the stuck armored vehicle and the information that, in one particular house approximately 75 meters east of the target building, the terrorists who escaped were still hiding.⁷⁷ Also, the troops secured the recovery of the stuck vehicles upon the arrival of an armored recovery vehicle and the leaders planned for the clearing and conducted reconnaissance of the building where the terrorists were reported to be hiding. I decided that the clearing of the suspected hiding place of the terrorists would be done in the following morning to give the troops, who already fought for more than 24 hours without sleep and little food, a chance to rest. The concept of the plan was to soften the suspected hiding place of the terrorist with rockets from close air support (CAS) and machine-gun fire from armored vehicles prior to the clearing of the building. The requested CAS was delayed and later cancelled in order to prioritize the support for the rescue of the two armored vehicles in Barangay Marinaut, Marawi City. The clearing was done by mid-afternoon and the troops found holes in between buildings and traces of blood, used enemy clothes with bloodstains, and two sniper rifles. Finally, after the clearing operation, the raiding forces were permitted to return to base.⁷⁸

After clearing the vicinity Barangay Basak Malutlut of the terrorist threat, JSOU3 forces together with the armored vehicles, 4SRC and 14DRC consolidated along the main road for exfiltration.⁷⁹ After accounting, the whole pack started for Camp Ranao on foot. While traversing the highway going back to Camp Ranao, the terrorists conducted an ambush against the raiding forces. A heavy firefight followed. The terrorists who ambushed the government forces fled towards the vicinity of the central business district

⁷⁶ “WATCH: Maute, Hapilon Plan Marawi Terror Attack,” CNN, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/06/08/maute-hapilon-videos-marawi-terror-plot.html>.

⁷⁷ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

⁷⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

⁷⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Oplan Bingo,’” 7.

where most of their comrades were hiding. After the ambush, raiding forces consolidated, continued to walk, reached the camp, and the mission was over.⁸⁰

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter narrated the raid that triggered the start of the Marawi siege and detailed the narrative of the preparation and execution of Operation Bingo that started the five-month-long crisis in Marawi City. Analysis of the events narrated revealed lessons learned that involve intelligence, planning, execution, contingencies and the avoidance of swarming attack.

The government forces tracked the location of the leader of the terrorists; however, other details provided for the operation, like the number of terrorists in the target building and description of the target building, were inaccurate. The intelligence unit tracked the location of the leader of ISIS-Philippine who was skilled in evading government forces. However, the other information needed by the planners was incomplete and inaccurate. Therefore, learning from the things that both succeeded and failed in Operation Bingo, other than providing the location of the targets, the intelligence units should also try to provide details needed for planning the operations, like the estimated number of terrorists in the target building and the exact description of the target building.

The government forces planned for the operation, but they failed to plan for contingencies accordingly. The government forces planned the operation hastily. The security of the plan, the plan for the breaching, and raid of the house worked during the execution, but the planners fell short in contingency planning. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JSOU3 forces that both succeeded and failed, planners should devote time for contingency planning with regards to the possible reaction of the terrorists and possible scenarios that may occur during the operation.

The execution of the raid started according to plan; however, when the government forces suffered casualties, the focus of the troops shifted to the evacuation of the wounded, which put them in a defensive mode. This ordeal shifted the effort of the troops from

⁸⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

accomplishing the mission. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JSOU3 forces who both succeeded and failed, the commander on the ground should also adapt to the situation as quickly as possible in order to regain the initiative of the battle and accomplish the mission. Instead of concentrating on the evacuation of the wounded, which put them in a defensive mode, the commander should delegate the task of evacuating the wounded personnel and lead the effort of completing the mission.

The terrorists counterattacked, but the government forces were not overwhelmed and withstood the counterattack. The terrorists and the armed civilians in the area were known for their swarm tactics, but the large number of deployed forces for Operation Bingo could be what discouraged the terrorists from going further in employing their swarm tactics, and discouraged armed civilians from joining the swarm against those involved in the raid. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JSOU3 forces that both succeeded and failed, military planners should always consider employing large number of supporting elements and a reserve force when conducting an operation against an enemy known for swarming tactics. The next chapter will describe the narrative of the attempt of JSOG forces to rescue the crew of light armored vehicles trapped in the MBA.

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III. BATTLE OF BANGGOLO BRIDGE

A. INTRODUCTION

On May 23, 2017, the raid at the presumed location of the Emir of ISIS-Philippines escalated into the Marawi City crisis. The terrorists reacted by carrying out coordinated attacks on hospitals, jails, schools, a police station, and a Catholic church within the city of Marawi.⁸¹ The attacks were initially deemed as diversionary to redirect the attention of government forces from the area of the raid. However, the recovery of an internal computer drive from the safe house of the emir revealed the plan of the terrorists to attack the city, as in the style of attack of ISIS in the Middle East.⁸²

This chapter will narrate the consolidation of JSOG Forces in Marawi City and the reorganizations made by government forces to adapt to the changing situation. This chapter also narrates the efforts of government forces to rescue the trapped crews of two armored vehicles. This chapter highlights the struggle of JSOG forces to cross the Banggolo bridge to set foothold in the Main Battle Area (MBA) in order to pursue the rescue operation.

B. CONSOLIDATION OF JSOG FORCES TOWARD MARAWI CITY

Upon hearing the feedback regarding Operation Bingo, the Commander of JSOG issued guidance to his operation officer to plan and coordinate the possible movement of all JSOG forces deployed nationwide towards Marawi City.⁸³ Alerted by the development and by the intensity of the firefight in Barangay Basak Malutlut, JSOG issued a warning order to 2LRC, which was deployed in JSOG Headquarters, for possible deployment in Marawi City. The attack of the terrorists against several establishments caused the AFP leadership to deploy all JSOG forces, including those who were undergoing unit retraining, to Marawi City. Early in the morning of May 24, 2017, the JSOG command group, together with 2LRC, was transported by C-130 aircraft to Laguindingan Airport in Misamis

⁸¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 7.

⁸² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

⁸³ Operation officer of JSOG, Personal Communication, May 2017.

Oriental.⁸⁴ Laguindingan Airport was the closest airport to Marawi City.⁸⁵ This became the access point of all government troops travelling by aircraft before travelling by land towards Marawi City. Another C-130 aircraft transported JSOU2 personnel, 6LRC and “C” Platoon of NAVSOU8 from Davao City.⁸⁶ These initial JSOG forces were consolidated in Camp Ranao before sunset.⁸⁷

The other units that arrived on the second day of fighting were the Task Group Panther “A” (TGP “A”), composed of the troops of 14SRC, the students of Scout Ranger Course Class-200 who were on their test mission, and the 2nd Scout Ranger Battalion. These units, previously assigned in the province of Sulu, were transported by C-130 aircraft.⁸⁸ The units that arrived in Marawi City were organized by virtue of OPLAN “Liberation.”

The second group of JSOG forces that arrived in Marawi City were 3LRC and 1LRC.⁸⁹ Instead of undergoing sustainment training in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, these companies were ordered to Marawi City. They arrived at Camp Ranao on May 25 and 26, respectively. The sniper platoon of 5LRC and the support elements sent by Light Reaction Regiment arrived on May 26. This completed the build-up of JSOG forces in Marawi City.

C. PLANNING

JSOG forces was tasked initially to reinforce the embattled crews of the armored vehicles.⁹⁰ JSOG tasked JSOU2, composed of command and control elements of JSOU2, 6LRC and 2LRC, to conduct the operation. The plan was for JSOU2 forces to infiltrate by

⁸⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 10.

⁸⁵ “Closest Airport to Marawi City, Philippines,” Closest Airport to, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.closestairportto.com/city/philippines/marawi-city/>.

⁸⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 10.

⁸⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

⁸⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

⁸⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

⁹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 13.

air towards the landing zone of Kakilala Detachment of 51IB and then proceed on foot about 2.8 kilometers southwest of the armored vehicles. JSOU2 would be supported by 2SRB, JSOU1 and TGP “A.” 2SRB was tasked to follow JSOU2 and block any terrorist reinforcements coming from northwest of the location of the two armored vehicles. JSOU1 was tasked to secure the bodies of water south and southwest of Marawi City, the Lanao Lake and the upper course of Agus river. Lastly, TGP “A” was tasked to secure the Banggolo Bridge (also known as Bayabao Bridge) and Raya Madaya Bridge (Masiu Bridge). The plan for JSOU2 did not push through due to delays caused by unavailability of night-capable aircrafts to ferry the troops, but it was necessary to send immediate reinforcement for the beleaguered troops of the armored vehicles.⁹¹

D. LINK-UP

On May 25, 2017, the third day of the battle, TGP “A,” while on their way towards the vicinity of Banggolo Bridge and Raya Madaya Bridge, encountered about 100 terrorists in the vicinity of Barangay Raya Saduc (Figure 4).⁹² The terrorists still controlled the areas at the vicinity of the bridges that linked the east and west sides of the city. Four of the troops of TGP “A” were immediately killed in action at the start of the battle. This prompted the commander of 1st Infantry Division to send JSOU2 forces as a reinforcement and alter the previous plan.⁹³

⁹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 14.

⁹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 14.

⁹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 14.

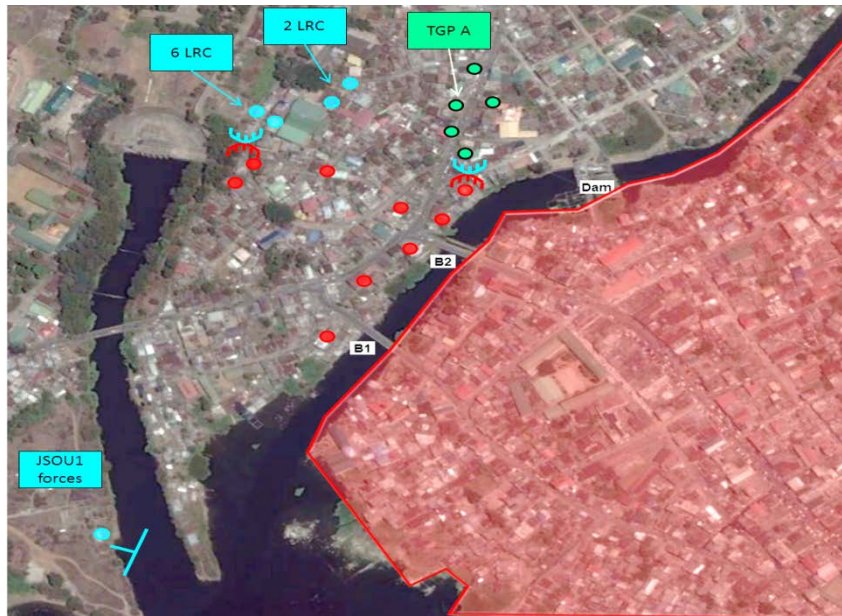


Figure 4. The location of troops and terrorists before the link-up.⁹⁴

The new plan was for 2SRB to infiltrate towards the Kakilala Detachment of 51IB and then to proceed southwest to the location of the armored vehicles in Barangay Marinaut.⁹⁵ The new task for JSOG forces was to reinforce TGP “A” and to take control of the two bridges to facilitate the safe crossing of all government forces tasked to rescue civilians who were trapped in the eastern side of the city. JSOG assigned JSOU2 for the job of clearing the bridge and to also attempt to reinforce the crews of the armored vehicles. In addition, Joint Task Group-Philippine National Police (JTG-PNP) was tasked to clear the Banggolo Market after crossing the bridge. Lastly, 62DRC from 6th Infantry Division was tasked with securing the bridges once the government forces regained control of them.⁹⁶

JSOU2 forces was composed of JSOU2 command and control elements, 6LRC, 2LRC, and Forward Air Controller from 721st Special Operations Squadron. They were

⁹⁴ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 15.

⁹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 14.

⁹⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 14.

supported by SOCOM Sniper Task Unit (SSTU) and a platoon of armored vehicles for 5th MIC. The troops, while moving towards the designated link-up point were fired upon by terrorists using grenade launchers and other high-powered firearms.⁹⁷ A troop of 6LRC, who was with leading elements in the movement, was hit.⁹⁸ He was given appropriate care and taken back to Camp Ranao. At that time, both JSOU2 forces and TGP “A” were engaged in a firefight with terrorists in their respective locations (Figure 4).⁹⁹ JSOU2 forces started clearing buildings along the way. They pushed the enemy back and temporarily occupied cleared buildings for overnight stay.¹⁰⁰ Under the cover of darkness, at about 2100H, the 62DRC, who were supposed to secure the bridges when control of the bridges was regained by government forces, moved ahead of the JSOU2 forces. 62DRC was engaged by the terrorists. 6LRC, being the nearest government force in the location of the beleaguered troops, assisted and guided the troops of 62DRC to safety. The commander of 6LRC personally led the rescue of one squad of 62DRC that was left behind and unable to move back due to the concentration of fire against them. After the rescue, when it was discovered that one soldier was missing, the commander of 6LRC went back and rescued him. The rescued troop was left behind because he was wounded and unable to move without assistance. A firefight between the government forces and the terrorists ensued sporadically throughout the night. The terrorists occupied tactically significant locations in the area that caused delays for the movement of government troops.

At the following dawn, May 26, JSOU2 forces and JTG-PNP continued moving towards the designated link-up point with TGP “A.” Each building and house along the way had to be cleared. The JSOU2 forces cleared the buildings on the right side of the road while JTG-PNP forces cleared the buildings on the left side. However, the enemy resistance made the clearing of a building a challenging task. This caused further delays in the movement of government troops towards their objective. The situation prompted JSOU2

⁹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 15.

⁹⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 4.

⁹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 15.

¹⁰⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish,” 4.

forces and JTG-PNP to combine forces under the command of JSOU2 for unity of command. Skirmishes continued throughout the day. During the firefight, several terrorists were killed, and high-powered weapons and items with intelligence value like cellphones and handheld radios were recovered. Government forces monitored the movement of the terrorists approaching their location and spotted one pick-up vehicle used by the terrorists with an M2 .50 caliber machine gun mounted at its back. JSOU2 forces confronted them, neutralized one terrorist and repelled the terrorists' counterattack. In return, the terrorists wounded one troop of 2LRC.¹⁰¹ A troop of 6LRC suffered from gunshot wounds and another troop was wounded from the fragments of a grenade thrown to their location.¹⁰² The wounded who could still fight opted to return to the front after treatment of their wounds and the administration of an anti-tetanus toxoid.

The link-up had been difficult for the government forces due to communication gaps.¹⁰³ Government troops used different radio frequencies that made transmission of their location to other government troops difficult. Only the command groups of different units can communicate with one another using mobile phones as their means of communication. Their subordinate units, who were scattered in the area, relied on their command groups to coordinate their locations. There were times when government troops fired at each other due to identification problems, miscommunication or lack of communication regarding the locations of forces. Not all government forces wore helmets and vests. The situation was further complicated by the random presence of terrorists in buildings in between the locations of the government forces. There was no prior information regarding the locations and the number of the terrorists who attacked the city. The battle was close enough that a hand grenade can be thrown by the terrorists to the location of the government forces. The link-up took time even though the distance between Camp Ranao and the link-up point was just approximately 650 meters.

¹⁰¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

¹⁰² Philippine Army, "After Battle Report—OPLAN 'LIBERATION' 06-2017" (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Light Reaction Regiment, November 16, 2017), 4.

¹⁰³ Commander of JSOU2, Personal Communication, 2017

It took about 48 hours for the JSOU2 forces to link-up with the TGP “A.” The link-up finally happened by mid-afternoon at around 1435H of May 27, on the third day after JSOU2 forces left Camp Ranao. The link-up happened after JSOU2 forces encountered terrorists on several occasions on different buildings while moving from their previous location the day before towards the designated link-up point. JSOU2 forces neutralized eight terrorists and recovered several high-powered firearms and communication equipment used by the terrorists.¹⁰⁴ Just before noon, higher headquarters ordered an operational pause for one hour at noon (1200-1300H) to give civilians caught in the fight a chance to escape.¹⁰⁵ However, terrorists shot at those who attempted to flee; therefore, the government forces were ordered to continue the operation.¹⁰⁶

The link-up resulted in better coordination between JSOU2 forces and TGP “A.” The commanders exchanged information about troop locations and divided the area into sectors that each would be responsible for. They also established a communication line. Lastly, they coordinated their plans with each other.

After the link-up, JSOU2 forces started clearing buildings on the western side of Banggolo Bridge, especially one building serving as a terrorist stronghold.¹⁰⁷ This building was vital to the troops crossing the bridge to get to the east. While the troops were on the process of clearing the buildings, the JSOU2 commander met with the officers of the units under his command and together they devised a plan to cross the bridge. The commander of 6LRC volunteered to lead his company in spearheading the crossing. It was planned that the troops would conduct a rolling assault, utilizing the available armored vehicles to transport them across the bridge. They would then clear and occupy one building in order to establish a foothold on the other side of the river. However, before the

¹⁰⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish,” 5.

¹⁰⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 16.

¹⁰⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish,” 5.

troops were to cross the bridge it was vital for government forces to ensure that the western side of the river that divided Marawi City was cleared from the terrorist presence.

E. CROSSING OF BANGGOLO BRIDGE

Early in the morning of May 28, JSOU2 forces were engaged by the terrorists while clearing the area north of Banggolo Bridge. The four armored vehicles available could only accommodate one platoon.¹⁰⁸ By mid-morning the platoon from 6LRC, led by their CO, crossed the bridge.¹⁰⁹ Immediately after disembarking from the armored vehicles, the platoon was engaged by numerous terrorists around them. They neutralized one terrorist, but three soldiers were hit. One was fatally wounded, and others were superficially wounded while conducting room-clearing. The wounded personnel were immediately evacuated by armored vehicles. The firefight continued even after the first floor of the building was already cleared of the terrorists. Terrorists at the second floor of the building continually fired at the position of the troops. The terrorists in the neighboring buildings also shot at the troops of 6LRC.¹¹⁰

Seeing that terrorists were massing up at the location of 6LRC, government forces tried to support the platoon that crossed the bridge.¹¹¹ For a number of times, the terrorists attempted to overwhelm the troops and retake the building occupied by 6LRC but failed. With the leadership of their CO and the determination of the troops, 6LRC withstood the terrorist attacks against them. The commander of 6LRC requested fire support to target the enemy positions. The armored vehicles, with their M2 .50 caliber machine-gun, provided crucial fire support to the besieged 6LRC troops by providing well-placed single fire towards the second floor of the building occupied by 6LRC. The troops on the western side of the river provided indirect fire from grenade launchers to target the terrorists on the second floor. 60 mm mortars were directed at terrorists in buildings surrounding the building occupied by troops of 6LRC. CAS was also requested to hit targets close to

¹⁰⁸ Philippine Army, "After Battle Report—OPLAN 'LIBERATION' 06-2017," 4.

¹⁰⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 5.

¹¹⁰ Philippine Army, "After Battle Report—OPLAN 'LIBERATION' 06-2017," 4.

¹¹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 6.

6LRC's location. The fire that supported 6LRC continued until nighttime as the government forces used 105 mm artillery. The commander of JSOU2, who took the role of forward observer, requested artillery fire every 30–45 minutes to deny the terrorists a chance to mass-up their forces against 6LRC.

While the government forces fought the terrorists, JTF-Zampelan issued fragmentary order number 1 (FRAGO Nr1) to create JTF-Marawi.¹¹² In this order JSOG forces were designated as JTG-SOF. Other joint task groups were also created such as TGP, JTG-Haribon, JTG-Bakal, JTG-Tiger and JTG-PNP. These task groups were given their respective assignments.¹¹³

At daybreak of May 29, 6LRC cleared the second, third and fourth floors of the building that they occupied.¹¹⁴ Their reinforcement, composed of 6LRC snipers and EOD teams, were brought by armored vehicles to their location. 6LRC snipers became busy throughout the day. Attack helicopters still provided CAS for the troops and JSOU2 forces occasionally encountered an undetermined number of terrorists in the western side of the river.

The crews of the armored vehicles who were trapped in Barangay Marinaut were already rescued by JTG-Haribon.¹¹⁵ JTG-Haribon were the government troops under 103rd Infantry Brigade who conducted operations against the New People's Army prior to the start of the battle about 35 kilometers east of Marawi City.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 18.

¹¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 18.

¹¹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 6.

¹¹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 21.

¹¹⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

F. FA50 BOMB-RUN

It was suggested that FA50 jets be utilized for airstrikes against the terrorists' strongholds near the location of 6LRC.¹¹⁷ These jets were new aircraft of the Philippine Air Force (PAF). They were equipped with advanced systems for accurately delivering bombs.¹¹⁸

By mid-morning of May 30, the commander of JSOU2 presided over a meeting regarding a plan to extricate 6LRC from their foothold across the bridge.¹¹⁹ The purpose of the plan was to protect them from the effect of the bombing run to be conducted using the FA50s. In the afternoon, other JSOU2 forces continued clearing buildings and houses as there was still a terrorist presence in the western side of the Marawi City. JSOU2 forces encountered terrorists late in the afternoon. Two 2LRC troops were wounded during that encounter. Later, artillery support and CAS targeted known terrorists' positions close to the location of 6LRC. The delay of the bombing run prompted higher headquarters to approve the reinforcement of 6LRC at the eastern side of the river by 3LRC.¹²⁰ The CO of 3LRC with the Platoon of 5th Mechanized Company conducted reconnaissance at the other side of the river.¹²¹

At 0300H of May 31, 3LRC led by their CO crossed Banggolo Bridge on foot to link-up with the 6LRC.¹²² After the link-up, 3LRC breached and assaulted the building adjacent to the location of 6LRC (Figure 5). The assault alerted the terrorists and a heavy firefight ensued between the government forces and the terrorists inside the building. CAS was made available to support the assault of 3LRC, and targeted buildings known to be occupied by terrorists. The government forces freed eleven civilians caught in the battle

¹¹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 20.

¹¹⁸ GlobalSecurity.org, "A-50 Light Combat Aircraft," accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/rok/a-50.htm>.

¹¹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 7.

¹²⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 20.

¹²¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 7.

¹²² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

and the building was secured from the terrorists. However, one officer of 3LRC was killed and nine troops were wounded during the firefight.



Figure 5. The location of troops and terrorists' stronghold at eastern side of the river.¹²³

Early in the evening, a meeting was held at the Tactical Command Post (TCP) of JSOU2 to plan for the pullback of troops from the other side of the bridge to give way for the bombing run.¹²⁴ As per my experienced, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) required all government forces to stay at least 200 meters away from the targets for safety in every FA50 bombing run.¹²⁵ Due to the proximity of the government forces to the terrorists' stronghold at the other side of the river, all components of JSOU2 were required to pull back from their location and complied with the requirements of the PAF.

To minimize the risk of the movement, JSOU2 forces started to pull back at 0300H of the following day, June 1.¹²⁶ The farthest troops, 6LRC and 3LRC, were the first to

¹²³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 20.

¹²⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 7.

¹²⁵ The author is the Commander of JSOU3 during the battle of Marawi.

¹²⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 7.

move back from the other side of the bridge. The snipers reported that there were terrorists who took advantage of the pullback of the government forces and crossed the bridge towards the previous location left by the JSOU2 forces.¹²⁷ Two FA50s dropped four 500 pounds bombs at 0630H hitting two of the targets.¹²⁸ The other two bombs missed the targets by about 15 and 40 meters, respectively. The damage caused by the bombs to the buildings was minimal compared to the expectation of the troops.¹²⁹

After the bombing run, JSOU2 forces carefully returned to the buildings they had left.¹³⁰ They systematically cleared all the buildings at the western side of the river to ensure that the area was free of terrorist presence prior to reoccupation. The building that 6LRC occupied at the other side of the river was destroyed and became indefensible.¹³¹ However, 6LRC assisted four civilians fleeing from the eastern side of the bridge by mid-morning, and another three civilians late in the afternoon.¹³²

G. RESCUE OF TRAPPED CIVILIANS

The morning of June 2 started with an after-activity review (AAR) held at the JSOU2 TCP.¹³³ All unit commanders under JSOU2 gave feedback regarding their participation in their previous operation. This feedback shared by the units was briefed by the commander of JSOU2 to the SOCOM Commander who visited the JSOU2 TCP in the afternoon. After the visit of SOCOM Commander, JSOU2 forces continued their mission, fortified strategic locations, and employed the capability of Civilian Military Operations (CMO) teams to conduct loudspeaker operations. The loudspeaker operation was

¹²⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

¹²⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 21.

¹²⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish,” 7.

¹³⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

¹³¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 21.

¹³² Philippine Army, “After Battle Report—OPLAN ‘LIBERATION’ 06–2017,” 4.

¹³³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish,” 8.

conducted to communicate with trapped civilians in the eastern side of Marawi City. The loudspeaker operation convinced the civilians to come out of the buildings and provided instructions for the civilians to use the mobility corridor for their safe escape from the terrorist-controlled area.

On June 3, after a day of loudspeaker operations, the effort of JSOU2 forces showed results. They rescued 182 civilians coming out from the terrorist-controlled area. The crews of the armored vehicles that were trapped in Barangay Marinaut were also rescued by JTG-Haribon.¹³⁴ JTG-Haribon were the government troops under 103rd Infantry Brigade that conducted operations against the New People's Army prior to the start of the battle about 35 kilometers east of Marawi City.¹³⁵

Another change of plan through FRAGO Number 2 was released on June 4 for the reorganization of JTF-Marawi.¹³⁶ The mission of JSOG forces was changed, as well as its direction of attack. Instead of coming from the bridge to attack the terrorists, JTG-SOF forces approached from the north of Marawi City and moved to the southwest. JSOU2 forces continued their operations until being redeployed to Barangay Tolali.¹³⁷ While they awaited their redeployment, only the snipers of JSOU2 engaged in fighting the terrorists. The terrorists conducted a counterattack against the TCP of JSOU2. The terrorists used grenade launchers which wounded seven government forces. Two of the wounded were evacuated because their serious injuries. The other wounded troops with less serious injuries decided to stay. On June 6, JSOU2 forces eventually left the area of Banggolo and joined the JTG-SOF command group and JSOU3 forces in the MBA.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 21.

¹³⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

¹³⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 22.

¹³⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Banggolo Bridge Skirmish," 9.

¹³⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 23.

H. CONCLUSION

This chapter narrated the response of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to the attack of terrorists on Marawi City. The narration included the consolidation, initial days of battle, creation of JTF-Marawi, and how the response for the crisis was organized. Analysis of the events narrated revealed lessons learned that involves approach toward the objective, movement in urban area, communications, use of loudspeaker and utilizations of aerial bombing in urban areas.

The government forces conducted rescue operations for the crew of the armored vehicles trapped in Barangay Marinaut, but the rescue's main effort failed. The rescue's main effort took the most direct route towards the location of the trapped armored vehicles. The other rescue effort succeeded by using another route that was more accessible for rescue operations. Therefore, learning from both successes and failures, the government forces should quickly assess the best approach towards its objective to prevent the waste of effort, time and lives.

The government forces suffered casualties on the initial firefight, but they overcame the terrorists at the western side of the river. The government forces lacked clear information regarding the location and estimated number of terrorists, but they were deployed immediately for the rescue of the crew of the armored vehicles. Upon realizing the extent of the threat, the troops sought cover inside the residential buildings and moved carefully by methodically clearing all structures along the way while moving forward. Therefore, learning from both successes and failures, before deploying troops in a hostile environment, they should be properly informed about the situation. In case information is not available, the troops should move carefully when in urban areas and in a situation where the danger is imminent but there is no clear picture of the threat at hand.

The government forces, deployed to rescue the crew of the trapped armored vehicles, lacked common frequencies for communication but they communicated over mobile phones. The government forces came from different areas, so their radio frequencies were different. Higher headquarters failed to synchronize the frequencies of the units before deploying them. The communications gap hindered linking-up with other

units and caused government forces to shoot at each other. The government troops used mobile phones to communicate with other units. Therefore, learning from both successes and failures, higher headquarters must ensure that all operating units be linked into a single communication network before deploying them to fight in the same urban area. In addition, at the least, there should be an alternate means of communications in case the primary fails.

There were civilians trapped inside the terrorist-controlled area, but the government forces communicated with them by loudspeaker to convince civilians to come out and use the mobility corridors for their safe escape from the terrorists. The civilians were unable to come out due to the danger of being shot by both terrorists and government forces. The government forces, using a loudspeaker, eventually rescued the trapped civilians. Therefore, learning from this experience that went well, loudspeaker can be an effective tool in communicating with the masses in a chaotic environment.

The government forces utilized FA50 jets for bombing the terrorist strongholds, but they abandoned the buildings that they cleared at the eastern side of the river and the frontline buildings at the western side of the river. The government forces miscalculated the effect of 500-pound bombs and required their troops to move backwards. This gave the terrorists the opportunity to occupy the buildings abandoned by the government forces. However, the government forces confirmed the accuracy of the FA50s in delivering bombs and tested the effects of 500-pound bombs in an urban area. The troop withdrawal for FA50 bombing caused cleared buildings to be reoccupied by terrorists. This prompted the government forces to abandon the use of the bridges as an approach towards the MBA and use the much safer route of Roroagus. The river became the boundary between the government forces and the terrorists. This resulted in a clear demarcation between the two sides.

Therefore, learning from the successes and failures of FA50s in urban battle, the jets could be a reliable platform for close air support. The effect of the 500-pound bombs in an urban area is not as devastating as government forces expected. Also, the boundary between friendly forces and the enemy should be clear to distinguish the location of friendly forces and the terrorists. Lastly, it could be advantageous to use other longer but

safer routes of advance than use a shorter but heavily defended route. The next chapter narrates the operations of JTG-SOF in the MBA.

IV. MAIN BATTLE AREA

A. INTRODUCTION

The new mission of JTG-SOF forces was “to destroy enemy forces north of MBA in order to neutralize leaders and push the enemies toward the designated constriction area.”¹³⁹ This development was attributed to the request of the commander of JTG-SOF to use Roroagus as the route for his troops towards the MBA (Figure 6).¹⁴⁰

This chapter narrates the operations of JTG-SOF forces inside the MBA during the Marawi siege until the clearing of Bato Mosque. This chapter will describe how the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) of JTG-SOF forces improved and how firepower and equipment affected the outcome of the operations. In some parts of this chapter, I will share my personal observations and experiences as one of the participants in resolving the crisis.



Figure 6. New mission of JTG-SOF.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 22.

¹⁴⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 21.

¹⁴¹ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 22.

B. BATTLE HANDOVER

On June 6, 2017, JSOG forces used the Roroagus route and moved towards Barangay Tolali in the northern part of Marawi City.¹⁴² JTG-SOF made the necessary coordination with TGP “B” who had fought in Barangay Tolali for days. TGP “B” was composed of 4SRB, SR Class 201, 3SRC and 6SFC.¹⁴³

During a meeting for coordination, JTG-SOF and TGP “B” clarified the boundaries of the area of operation (AO).¹⁴⁴ The previous AO of TGP “B” was divided into two areas (Figure 7). JTG-SOF took the right side of the AO while TGP “B” took the left. The unnamed street that was prominent on the map and easy to recognize was assigned as the unit boundary between TGP “B” and JTG-SOF forces. JTG-SOF forces’ AO was bounded on the northwest by the Agus River. Beyond the Agus was the safe zone in Marawi City. The AO of JTG-SOF forces was further divided into sector A on the northwest and sector B on the southeast. JTG-SOF designated JSOU3 to clear sector A and JSOU2 to clear sector B, with Makalilay Street as the boundary between sectors.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

¹⁴³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

¹⁴⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.



Figure 7. Sectors of JTG-Vector and TGP “B.”¹⁴⁶

I noted that during the transition, the link-up and the battle handover were done smoothly.¹⁴⁷ TGP “B” troops briefed JTG-SOF forces on possible terrorist locations. Then, TGP “B” commander showed footage taken by quadcopter drones of enemy locations and activities. He also informed JTG-SOF forces that the terrorists were using drones with day and night capabilities. The communications between units were properly established by providing a common frequency for all Harris radios.

Based on my experience, the coordination between units in identifying locations was enhanced when JTG-SOF command group issued maps that used alphanumeric coding for the buildings.¹⁴⁸ The concept of JTG-SOF using codes for the buildings in the maps for better coordination was adopted by JTG-Marawi, thus all government forces used

¹⁴⁶ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

¹⁴⁷ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁴⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

common codes for all structures in the MBA. In the battle of Marawi, the numbers of coded buildings exceeded a thousand. Because of the large number of structures, the letters and combination of numbers and letters like M, NN, A1, F7, N24 were included in the code.

At about 1400H on June 8, JTG-SOF forces started to clear their respective sectors, starting from the last two buildings cleared by TGP “B” forces.¹⁴⁹ Then the terrorists fought the advance of JTG-Vector with heavy fire. The terrorists hit one of the armored vehicles assigned to support JSOU3 with a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). This killed one crew member and destroyed one armored vehicle. Then, JSOU2 forces, who moved alongside JSOU3, assisted in the recovery of the armored vehicle.¹⁵⁰ The recovery was difficult due to terrorist fire and the open spaces in between the buildings.¹⁵¹ The troops attached the downed vehicle to another armored vehicle and pulled it back towards a location controlled by government forces. The vehicle was finally recovered after the daring effort of the troops to approach the downed vehicle under fire.¹⁵²

At the time, I noted that the clearing operation progressed slowly.¹⁵³ The terrorists would fight heavily before the government troops could advance. Then, they tried to inflict casualties to government forces before they withdrew from buildings. Also, the terrorists burned houses, which further delayed the operation of government forces. Another cause of delay was the evacuation of those wounded clearing the terrorist-held buildings. The momentum of the troops was affected because the focus shifted from clearing of buildings to evacuating the wounded. Also, the troops had difficulty breaching the concrete walls of the buildings. In addition, the doors and the rat holes made by the terrorists were usually booby-trapped with bombs or guarded by shooters. This situation forced the JTG-SOF forces to make another hole in the wall to enter the building. To avoid detection, the

¹⁴⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 23.

¹⁵⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

¹⁵¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Tolali Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 2.

¹⁵² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

¹⁵³ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

terrorists cleverly used multiple loopholes for their shooters. I saw three layers of loopholes arranged in a line directed to the best possible route of government troops. The terrorist would fire at any troop who aligned with their loopholes. Lastly, the troops could not use the roads while moving towards their objective. They had to pass from one building to another. These were the reasons that I observed for the slow progress of the operation.¹⁵⁴

I noted that on June 10 additional troops were augmented to JTG-SOF forces with the arrival of the students of Special Forces Operations Course Class 134–16 (SFOC 134).¹⁵⁵ They were composed of six teams and were equally divided to augment JSOU2 and JSOU3. Also, one of the students of SFOC 134 spoke the Maranao language. The commander of JSOU2 gave this student a very important task. Aside from being a team leader, he was placed in charge of the radios that were recovered from the terrorists. He monitored the radios and translated all terrorist conversations that he heard. The students of SFOC 134 provided significant support for the success of operations conducted by JSOU2 and JSOU3.¹⁵⁶

C. REORGANIZATION

On June 12, JTF-Marawi was reorganized again to create new task groups for better command and control through FRAGO Number 3.¹⁵⁷ The new task groups were JTG-Vector, JTG-Musang, JTG-Ranao, and JTG-Lawa. JTG-SOF forces and TGP “B,” who fought alongside each other in Barangay Tolali, composed the JTG-Vector, with JTG-SOF Commander as JTG-Vector Commander. JTG-Musang took command and control of all Scout Ranger units in Marawi City except TGP “B.” Two infantry battalions were tasked to augment JTG-Musang. JTG-Ranao was tasked to provide command and control for all government troops in the safe zone. JTG-Lawa was tasked to command and control all units operating in Lanao Lake. Also, through FRAGO number 3, JTG-Tiger took

¹⁵⁴ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁵⁵ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁵⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁵⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 24.

responsibility for clearing sector A of JTG-SOF AO. JTG-Tiger was composed of the 1st Marine Brigade.¹⁵⁸

The previous task of JTG-Tiger was to clear the Mapandi bridge while the JSOU2 was clearing the Banggolo bridge.¹⁵⁹ I noted then that the higher headquarters realized the futility of crossing the bridges to enter the MBA. The terrorists effectively used the bridges as obstacles to the government forces, causing injuries to the troops and damage to equipment, particularly armored vehicles. Thus, the government forces stopped utilizing the bridges as routes towards the MBA. Lastly, I noted then that both party was able to prevent the other from using the bridges.¹⁶⁰

D. JTG-VECTOR

The JTG-SOF and TGP “B” became components of a bigger command, the JTG-Vector.¹⁶¹ JTG-PNP provided additional forces since it was attached to JTG-Vector by JTF Marawi. Most of the Special Action Force (SAF) troops of JTG-PNP were trained for urban warfare. The SAF brought with them their crew-served weapons like the M2 .50 caliber machine gun and Mark 19 automatic grenade launcher.¹⁶² During the battle in Marawi City, I learned that SAF troops from seaborne units were trained and equipped for seaborne operations by the Americans.¹⁶³ This included weapons training with crew-served weapons. Also, JTG-PNP provided translators because many troops from the Regional Public Safety Battalion (RPSB) were locals and were fluent in the local languages such as Maranao, Maguindanaoan, Tausug and Yakan. Lastly, JTG-PNP brought nursing graduates and established a medical aid station in the MBA.¹⁶⁴ Altogether, JTG-Vector

¹⁵⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 24.

¹⁵⁹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁶⁰ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁶¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 24.

¹⁶² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 24.

¹⁶³ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁶⁴ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

was composed of JSOU2 and JSOU3 with their LRCs, a Scout Ranger Battalion, JTG-PNP, the students of SFOC 134, SSTU and a MIC.¹⁶⁵

E. BATTLE IN BARANGAY DAGUDUBAN

Based on my experience, in order to soften the stronghold of the terrorists, government forces were inclined to request FA50 bombing.¹⁶⁶ On June 19, JTG-Tiger requested bombing of one of their target buildings that they had been attacking for days.¹⁶⁷ Prior to the bombing, all troops must retreat to a safe distance from the target. Then, the troops of JTG-Tiger moved back farther than the location of the two JSOUs. The terrorists moved forward to occupy the structures vacated by the JTG-Tiger troops. As a result, the right flank of the location of JSOU2 and JSOU3 became vulnerable and was attacked by the terrorists.¹⁶⁸ The terrorists attacked the building occupied by JSOU2 and JSOU3 with high explosive rounds like 40 mm rounds from grenade launchers and RPGs that almost destroyed a portion of the wall covering the troops.¹⁶⁹ Then, after a firefight of more than two hours, and as the response of the government forces strengthened, the terrorists ceased firing and withdrew to their stronghold.

TGP “B” accelerated their pace, cleared buildings within their sector and moved forward to Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard, the road that was connected to Mapandi Bridge.¹⁷⁰ JSOU2 and JSOU3 were left behind in the vicinity of Barangay Daguduban and moved alongside JTG-Tiger (Figure 8). JSOU2 and JSOU3 worked together in the task of clearing sector B of the JSOG AO. On the morning of June 21, the SAF co-located its forces in the sector the JSOUs. SAF relieved 1LRC and camped next to the building

¹⁶⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 28.

¹⁶⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁶⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Dagubduban Skirmish’” (Maguindanao, Philippines: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, February 5, 2018), 3.

¹⁶⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 6.

¹⁷⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 27.

occupied by JSOU2 and JSOU3. While the SAF troops fortified the building, terrorists attacked them from the sector of JTG-Tiger. One SAF troop was wounded and given appropriate care prior to evacuation.

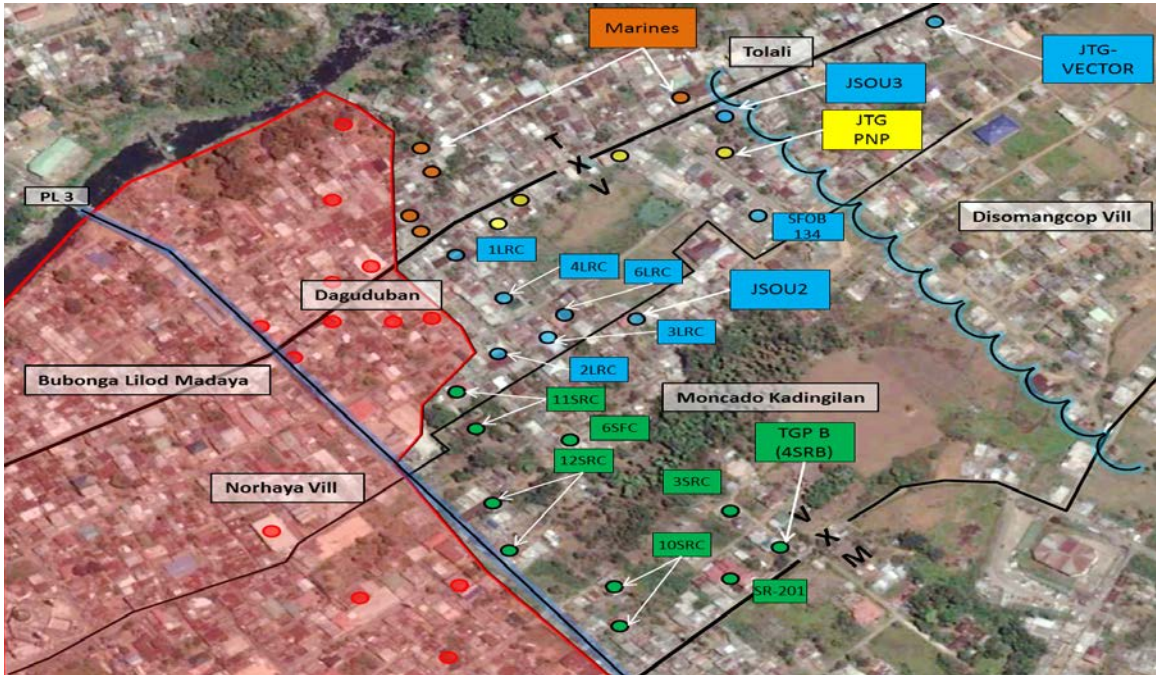


Figure 8. Location of troops in Barangay Daguduban as of July 9, 2017.¹⁷¹

As per my experience, JSOU2 and JSOU3 needed to clear a single line of houses at the left side of Makalilay Street because this series of houses was the only way forward within sector B.¹⁷² The troops were vulnerable in this single line of houses from their right flank, from the terrorists located in the sector of JTG-Tiger. In the afternoon of June 21, JSOU3 forces attempted to clear the houses.¹⁷³ As a result, one troop member was fatally

¹⁷¹ Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 27.

¹⁷² The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁷³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Dagubduban Skirmish,’” 3–4.

shot and two were slightly injured by terrorist fire which came from the sector assigned to JTG-Tiger.¹⁷⁴

I noted that one of the wounded was an officer who was hit in the waist, but his armored vest absorbed the bullet and kept him alive.¹⁷⁵ However, the officer was still evacuated from the combat zone due to broken ribs. The timely arrival of new armored vests procured by JSOG enhanced the protection of the troops while conducting clearing operation. These were issued to the troops prior to their movement towards Barangay Tolali. The vests saved the lives of several troops shot by the terrorists. The bullets were absorbed by the armored plates of the vests.¹⁷⁶

The remaining time of the afternoon was spent evacuating the fatality and the wounded personnel.¹⁷⁷ Then, after a casualty evacuation, JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces reorganized and reevaluated the operation.

At nighttime, a JSOU3 sniper neutralized three terrorists.¹⁷⁸ I remember that it was reported over the Harris radio that the sniper shot a terrorist.¹⁷⁹ The other two terrorists were shot attempting to retrieve their downed comrade.

The next day JSOU commanders met with their subordinate commanders.¹⁸⁰ During the meeting, it was assessed that the previously mentioned single line of houses could be cleared if the right flank of the JSOU troops doing the clearing could be protected. Thus, the two JSOU commanders sought permission from JTG-Tiger for JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces to clear the left portion of Sector A, which was to the right of the houses. The said portion was the location of the terrorists that most threatened the movement of the troops in sector B.

¹⁷⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

¹⁷⁵ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁷⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁷⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 4.

¹⁷⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

¹⁷⁹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸⁰ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

As per my experience, the threats of terrorists firing from another sector was a major concern for the JTG Vector forces.¹⁸¹ Also, TGP “B,” being forwardmost unit that moved ahead of other JTG-Vector units, was intermittently attacked by terrorists at their flank from the sector of JSOU forces. Because of this concern, the troops used M1919 and M2 Brownings instead of sledgehammers to breach the walls for alternate entry points to buildings. By using these weapons, the troops avoided exposure which would have occurred if sledgehammers were used to breach the walls. Thus, the risk of being shot by the terrorists in the other sector while in between buildings was minimized. Also, 2LRC was tasked to bypass the single line of houses, clear the eastern portion of Sector B and move ahead of other JSOU troops. 2LRC used the sector of TGP “B” as a route towards their objective. The purpose of 2LRC was to reduce the threat of the terrorists to the flank of TGP “B” coming from sector B.¹⁸²

On June 25, JTG-Vector took advantage of the command-directed humanitarian pause in order to observe the end of Ramadan to call for a command conference for mission planning.¹⁸³ The plan to ask permission of JTG-Tiger was presented and approved by the commander of JTG-Vector during the conference.¹⁸⁴ The plan was then coordinated to JTG-Tiger who agreed to let JSOU forces take a portion of their sector.

On June 26, JSOU forces occupied both sides of Makalilay Street and started to clear a building at a time. I noted that the situation for the troops improved.¹⁸⁵ The troops moved forward as buildings were cleared of terrorists. I received feedback from the commanders of the LRC units, that some of the troops were wounded from terrorist fire because of minor violations of SOPs like exposing parts of their bodies while throwing grenades. There are some tactics that were developed by the troops in clearing the buildings. The troops used tear gas before entering any known terrorist stronghold. The use

¹⁸¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸² The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish,” 8.

¹⁸⁴ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸⁵ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

of tear gas compensated for the lack of the element of surprise whenever the troops conducted assaults in any building. The troops expected that tear gas reduced the ability of the terrorists to fight effectively.¹⁸⁶

The JSOU3 forces cleared three buildings from the sector of JTG-Tiger that day.¹⁸⁷ The JSOU troops ruled out night movement for various reasons.¹⁸⁸ First was the noise building debris might create if the troops stepped on it during night movement. Second was the identification of those who were moving at night. Not all government forces involved in the battle of Marawi used night vision goggles (NVG). Anybody who moved at night near the front-line location of the JTG Vector forces without prior coordination were most likely terrorists. Lastly, JSOU forces, although trained and equipped to fight at night, were not equipped with flash suppressors to make them invisible to waiting terrorists whenever they used their weapons in the dark.

JSOU2's important accomplishment reported on June 26 was the interception of the radio communication of the terrorists concerning the location of the terrorists tasked to conduct counter-sniping operations.¹⁸⁹ The location was identified by the interpreter due to his familiarity with the area. The report also mentioned that the information was relayed and disseminated to all concerned government units for counteraction.

F. DANGER CLOSE

On July 1, JTF-Marawi allocated one bomb for a target chosen by JSOU forces and SAF at the sector of JTG-Tiger.¹⁹⁰ The troops developed confidence with the accuracy of bomb delivery of the FA50.¹⁹¹ Prior to the bombing run, troops informed the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 that they would not pull back from their locations in order to take

¹⁸⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 5.

¹⁸⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁸⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 8.

¹⁹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

¹⁹¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

advantage of the impact of the bomb. The troops occupied houses that were at least 30 meters from the target building of the bombing run. The troops assumed that the impact would at least make the terrorists occupying the target building confused. Immediately after the impact of the bomb on the target building, the troops started their assault with tear gas guns fired towards the target, and the troops rushed to get close to the building.¹⁹² The assault was seen by higher headquarters through their drone deployed for the purpose of monitoring the impact of the bombs. The commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 were then asked to explain why the troops could stay close to the target of the bombing run which was dangerous.¹⁹³ JSOU2 troops fought terrorists who stubbornly defended the target building for about four hours before withdrawing.¹⁹⁴ The troops cleared the building without any casualties. Simultaneously, JSOU3 on the other side of the road also cleared one building and recovered a .50 caliber sniper rifle from the terrorists.¹⁹⁵ The buildings were then occupied and fortified by JSOU forces for possible terrorist counterattack.

As per my experience, when the MBA was generally quiet at night, the CMO unit attached to JSOU2 conducted loudspeaker operations.¹⁹⁶ They played recorded psychological operations audio materials. The audio materials encouraged terrorists to surrender and contained instructions for hostages on how to safely reach the government forces if able to escape. Also, the CMO unit announced a mobile phone number in case the terrorists or hostages needed it. In the morning, before the noise of the fighting filled the MBA, the songs of the units of the government forces like the Scout Ranger song and Special Forces song were played to boost the morale of the troops fighting the terrorists. The CMO unit conducted the loudspeaker operation almost every day.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 10.

¹⁹³ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 10.

¹⁹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 6.

¹⁹⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁹⁷ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

During this period of the battle in Marawi, the terrorists started to booby-trap buildings with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) before they would abandon buildings assaulted by the JSOU forces.¹⁹⁸ On July 2, both JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces discovered IEDs and requested Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel to recover and dispose of the IEDs. The EOD personnel defused the bombs and blasted the bombs in place (BIP), or recovered the bombs and disposed of them together with recovered Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) at a safe location.¹⁹⁹

G. JSOUS IN DIVIDED SECTOR

On July 6, JSOU3 forces were tasked to shift to the right portion of the sector of TGP “B” that was headed towards the Grand Mosque of Marawi City.²⁰⁰ JSOU3 relieved 6SFC who occupied that portion of sector of TGP “B.” JSOU3 forces left the sector of JTG-Tiger and consolidated in sector B. The transition took several days as JSOU3 forces conducted reconnaissance and familiarization of their new sector, the CO of 6SFC briefed the officers of JSOU3 on the location of the terrorists, JSOU3 forces transferred their equipment and supplies close to the front lines, and set up a temporary command and control facility.²⁰¹

On the other hand, JSOU2 spent June 6 planning the clearing of sector B and resupply of its forces.²⁰² The following day, its forces were prepositioned in the vicinity of front-line cleared buildings in sector B. They fortified the buildings and used them for sniping operations. Then on June 8, JSOU2 forces started to clear nearby buildings from their location. JSOU2 forces cleared two buildings and recovered a bag filled with three mobile phones and one handheld radio like the radios used by the terrorists. SAF-EOD were asked to help defuse one IED from a cleared building. The interpreter later intercepted a message from the terrorists that the bag containing the mobile phones and radio was

¹⁹⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

¹⁹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish,” 12.

²⁰⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report ‘Dagubduban Skirmish,’” 7.

²⁰¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²⁰² Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish,” 13.

owned by one of the top leaders of the terrorists. During further clearing of buildings, two personnel were wounded when they tripped an IED placed by the terrorists before they left. In the following days, JSOU2 moved forward in their clearing of sector B. They cleared several terrorist strongholds within sector B, recovered high-powered firearms and ammunition, radios, pipe bombs (improvised hand grenades), mobile phones, tablets containing intelligence materials, and other paraphernalia used by the terrorists. The terrorists would not surrender their strongholds without a fight as JSOU2 forces encountered at least twenty terrorists while clearing the structures. At least two terrorists were confirmed neutralized during the firefight.²⁰³

H. FRAGO NUMBER 4

On July 9, JTF-Marawi released FRAGO 4 which took away the role of main effort from JTG-Vector.²⁰⁴ 2SRB was transferred under the operational control of JTG-Vector from JTG-Musang. The arrival of 2SRB was a welcome development for JTG-Vector considering that the sector assigned to JTG-Vector was the largest. For JTG-Vector, the execution of FRAGO 4 commenced when its troops crossed Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard (road linked by Mapandi Bridge) by its troops.

I. JOURNEY TOWARD SULTAN OMAR DIANALAN BOULEVARD.

On July 11, JSOU3 forces occupied the building left by 6SFC and chose that building to serve as advance command post (ACP).²⁰⁵ 1LRC occupied a building about 40 meters south of the ACP and supported 4LRC as they assaulted and cleared four buildings in the east of the ACP. After the buildings were cleared, JSOU3 forces together with JTG-PNP fortified and occupied them and used them for day and night sniping operations and

²⁰³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 15.

²⁰⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 27.

²⁰⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 8.

softening of terrorists' defenses at the other side of the road. JSOU3 forces waited for other units before they would cross the road.²⁰⁶

JSOU2, together with JTG-PNP, continued clearing buildings in sector B until they reached Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²⁰⁷ JSOU2 forces used quadcopter drones to observe the mortar fire in targeting terrorist strongholds. Also, JSOU2 continued monitoring radios captured from terrorists. Through the radios, the interpreter later learned that a terrorist commander and his two subordinates were neutralized in that particular mortar fire mission. The commander of JSOU2 was slightly wounded by a sniper shot during the conduct of leaders' reconnaissance with the commander of JSOU3 and commanders of LRC units. In addition, 6LRC and 3LRC troops bravely crossed an open terrain about 23-meter in length just to reach a building along Makalilay street. The troops encountered numerous terrorists which caused two soldiers from 3LRC to be wounded.²⁰⁸

From my observation, eventually JSOU2 troops cleared and occupied buildings along the eastern side of Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard. However, their presence in these buildings were threatened by the terrorists from the sector of JTG-Tiger. The JSOU2 commander took advantage of the timely arrival of an armored bulldozer to clear a path for the resupply and evacuation of troops in that part of sector B.²⁰⁹ The terrorists prevented the government forces' plan to make a pathway when the escorts of the armored bulldozer were shot by terrorist snipers. These were the same snipers from the sector of JTG-Tiger who threatened JSOU2 troops occupying buildings in sector B that were close to Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²¹⁰

I observed then that upon assessment of the threats from the sector of JTG-Tiger, the CO of 6LRC volunteered to help clear the terrorist stronghold in that sector.²¹¹ The

²⁰⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 9–10.

²⁰⁷ Joint Special Operation Unit 2, "After Battle Report-Daguduban Skirmish," 16.

²⁰⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 16.

²⁰⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 17.

²¹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 18.

²¹¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

plan was relayed to JTF-Vector and permission was requested from JTG-Tiger. On July 17, the request of JSOU2 was granted by JTG-Tiger.²¹² It was confirmed by the JTF-Vector commander during the meeting with the JSOU2, JSOU3 and LRC commanders. The target building was Salam Hospital. The terrorist snipers effectively defended the building from government attack and used the building as a hideout for the snipers to inflict casualties against JSOU forces.²¹³

The following day, the bulk of JSOU2's effort was for the clearing of Salam Hospital in the sector of JTG-Tiger.²¹⁴ 6LRC, PNP-SAF, two armored vehicles, and one SF Team were tasked to help in the sector of JTG-Tiger. The troops crossed Makalilay Street, utilizing the two armored vehicles to cover their movement. 6LRC had to clear two other buildings before they could clear Salam Hospital. The PNP-SAF and JTG-Tiger provided the necessary support-by-fire (SBF) during the conduct of the clearing operation. 2LRC and 3LRC snipers also provided SBF from the buildings of sector B close to the activities of 6LRC.²¹⁵

The tactic of firing one shot every ten seconds into an opening in the wall where the terrorists might possibly peek from and shoot at the troops became a norm to all JSOU, and JTG-PNP forces.²¹⁶ The CO of 6LRC assigned a troop for every window, door or any other opening in a wall. These soldiers were instructed to fire at their assigned opening once every ten seconds. This approach caused terrorist shooters to hesitate from using these openings. This tactic was effective for JSOU forces until the end of the battle of Marawi.²¹⁷

After the clearing of Salam Hospital, JSOU2 forces, JTG-PNP and JTG-Tiger had a breakthrough and cleared buildings up to Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²¹⁸ The

²¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 18.

²¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 18.

²¹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 18.

²¹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 18.

²¹⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²¹⁷ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²¹⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 19.

terrorists were monitored as they fled from the area cleared by JSOU2.²¹⁹ The terrorists took with them their wounded comrades. With this development, all JSOU forces were ready to cross the six-meter wide Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²²⁰

While waiting for the right time to cross the boulevard, JSOU3 forces, together with PNP-SAF, continuously engaged the buildings at the other side of the road with a heavy fire.²²¹ As per my experience, PNP-SAF troops from their seaborne units helped and taught the SF teams how to clean and prepare the M2 .50 caliber machine gun issued to JSOU3.²²² The seaborne troops were skilled at handling crew-served weapons because these weapons were attached to their rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIB). The skill that was imparted to the SF teams made the M2 .50 caliber machine gun issued to the JSOUs serviceable most of the time during of the battle of Marawi.²²³

The day prior to the crossing of the road, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 conducted mission planning together with the commanders of JTG-PNP, SAF, LRCs and armor unit in preparation for the simultaneous assault of the buildings at the other side of the road.²²⁴ The result of planning was subsequently presented during the meeting conducted at JTG-Vector headquarters.

J. CROSSING

At about 0300H on July 21, 4LRC and Crisis Response Group (CRG) of SAF for the sector of JSOU3 and 2LRC for the sector of JSOU2 crossed Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²²⁵ As per my experience, the crossing of Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard was one of the few instances when JSOU forces took advantage of their night capability, using

²¹⁹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²²⁰ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²²¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 9–10.

²²² The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²²³ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²²⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 19.

²²⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 20; Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 10.

the cover of darkness in assaulting buildings.²²⁶ The terrorists started to put up heavy resistance at daybreak.²²⁷ The terrorists inflicted casualties upon the government forces by shooting two 2LRC troops from the sector of JSOU3 and fatally wounding one troop. As the firefight continued, three additional 2LRC troops were slightly injured as they fought the terrorists. JSOU3 forces and PNP-SAF machine gunners provided SBF and prevented terrorist counterattack against 4LRC and CRG of SAF who just recently cleared buildings across the road. By noon, 2SRB troops relieved JSOU3 forces and SAF from the cleared buildings as planned, in connection with the implementation of FRAGO 4.²²⁸

K. NEW SECTORS

The morning of the following day was spent in coordination meeting and battle handover of the JSOU3 sector to 2SRB.²²⁹ JSOU2, JSOU3 and JTG-PNP also planned for the clearing of sector B. While the meeting was underway, the terrorists staged a counterattack in sector B.²³⁰ SAF troops who occupied the most forward building cleared by government forces in sector B were fired upon by terrorists. This resulted in one SAF troop killed and three wounded. SAF troops fought back and were later reinforced by 2LRC troops. The troops of 2LRC used the armored vehicles to help in the evacuation of the fatality and wounded troops. The SF teams also provided SBF to prevent the terrorists from capturing back the building held by SAF troops.²³¹

On July 23, 1LRC troops encountered heavy resistance in the building adjacent to the one occupied by SAF troops.²³² There were five 1LRC troops wounded in the initial firefight in that building which was finally cleared by noon the next day. The following

²²⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²²⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 20.

²²⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 10.

²²⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 11.

²³⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report-Dagubduban Skirmish," 20.

²³¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 20.

²³² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report 'Dagubduban Skirmish,'" 11.

day, 4LRC replaced 1LRC in that building then continued to clear neighboring buildings in the vicinity.

2SRB, which had just transferred from the sector of JTG-Musang to JTG-Vector's sector, was immediately engaged in a firefight with the terrorists.²³³ 2SRB troops started clearing their new sector and encountered several terrorists defending it. One troop member was fatally wounded in the exchange of gunfire. As they moved to clear another building, an IED exploded wounding five troops and one officer. The wounded were evacuated to an aid station where they were treated. However, 2SRB troops cleared two buildings on their first day in JTG-Vector sector.²³⁴

L. ROTATION

Based on my experience, the transfer of 2SRB to JTG-Vector, the JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces were able to adopt a rotation scheme for the LRC units.²³⁵ JSOU2 and JSOU3 would task one LRC under their command at a time in clearing operation while the other LRC units rested. Under JSOU2 were 2LRC, 3LRC, and 6LRC. On the other hand, under JSOU3 command were 1LRC, and 4LRC and CRG of SAF. Due to heavy loss of personnel, 4LRC teamed up with CRG of SAF in an informal arrangement until the end of the siege. CRG submitted under the command of the CO of 4LRC during clearing operations.²³⁶

Based on my experience for the rotation scheme, two LRCs were tasked for clearing a building each day.²³⁷ The LRCs could clear additional buildings if possible. However, they needed to clear their assigned building before being replaced for the next day. The LRCs who were unable to clear their assigned building continued at the task until it was completed. At night, the SF teams were left behind at the recently cleared buildings to

²³³ Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege" (Marawi City: First Scout Ranger Regiment, October 15, 2017), 24.

²³⁴ Philippine Army, 25.

²³⁵ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²³⁶ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²³⁷ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

secure them and prevent the terrorists from retaking them. In the same manner, the LRC units in charge of clearing the buildings rested at night to be fresh for battle the next morning. Occasionally, LRC troops stayed overnight in anticipation of terrorist counterattacks. JTF-Vector also implemented a rotation scheme for all the LRC units. One at a time, an LRC unit was pulled out from the MBA for one week. They used their time to rest and at the same time serve as JTF Marawi Quick Reaction Force (QRF). 6LRC troops declined to take their allocated one-week respite from the battle citing that one day of rest would be more than enough.²³⁸

M. MOVING ON

On July 31, JSOU troops moved forward after clearing several buildings. Because of this, the TCP of JSOU2, together with its supplies, relocated to a building across the Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard.²³⁹ JSOU3 supplies were also brought to the building close to the TCP of JSOU2. JSOU2 and JSOU3 combined their efforts to clear Sector B.²⁴⁰ Therefore, they also combined their command and control facilities. The condition of troops while resting during the battle of Marawi was not so bad. There were buildings that remained livable despite the damages caused by fighting between government forces and terrorists. Most of the buildings in Marawi City had their own deep well-water pumps and the JSOUs and the LRC units had their own generator sets for electricity. The troops would make the water pumps work and enjoyed an unlimited supply of fresh water for cooking, washing of clothes and bathing. The troops used the generator sets to charge radios and mobile phones. The troops also used the Roroagus route for buying supplies from nearby Iligan City which ensured that the troops would be eating hot meals while inside the MBA. I observed then that the availability of these basic needs kept troop morale high despite the danger and duration of the battle.²⁴¹

²³⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²³⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report—Bubonga Lilod Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 4.

²⁴⁰ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²⁴¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

After crossing the Sultan Omar Dianalan Boulevard, JTF-Vector troops faced numerous IEDs placed by terrorists.²⁴² The IEDs were placed mostly in the sector of 2SRB. In just ten days of operation under JTG-Vector, 2SRB recovered five IEDs, tripped two IEDs that caused eight casualties, and heard five IEDs explode when two of the buildings in their sector were burned by the terrorists.²⁴³ According to their report, the EOD team attached to them assumed that their sector was a minefield based on how the IEDs were made. The EODs suspected that they were opposed by terrorists who were bomb-making experts.²⁴⁴

N. SAFFRULLAH HOSPITAL

After several buildings were cleared by 2SRB, they faced the huge task of clearing Saffrullah Hospital in their sector.²⁴⁵ As reported by 2SRB, Saffrullah Hospital was a four-story building used by the terrorists as command headquarters and was fortified with machine gun nests and sniper posts. In their own sectors, 4SRB, JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces cleared buildings which were critical to support 2SRB in the clearing of Saffrullah Hospital. They occupied these buildings to prepare battle positions for snipers and crew-served weapons which would be used to support the operation of 2SRB.²⁴⁶ On August 2, 2SRB started to clear Saffrullah Hospital with the barrage of heavy weapons such as 76 mm high-explosive rounds from a fire support vehicle (FSV), M2 .50 caliber machine gun and 60 and 81 mm mortars to suppress the terrorists defending the target building.²⁴⁷ Then, the assaulters moved towards the target, set up and detonated bangalore mines, and started to clear Saffrullah Hospital floor by floor. The terrorists resisted with an M60 machine gun from their foxhole inside the building. The assaulters of 2SRB neutralized the resistance

²⁴² Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report—Bubonga Lilod Skirmish,” 1.

²⁴³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 24–28.

²⁴⁴ Philippine Army, “After Operation Report-Marawi Siege,” 27.

²⁴⁵ Philippine Army, 28.

²⁴⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 30.

²⁴⁷ Philippine Army, “After Operation Report-Marawi Siege,” 28.

using a 90 mm recoilless rifle. 2SRB forces cleared the building and recovered war materials such as guns, radios and IEDs rigged into a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tank.²⁴⁸

O. FRAGO 5- JSOTF-TRIDENT

The creation of JSOTF-Trident provided better management of resources within the MBA and better coordination between task groups.²⁴⁹ On August 6, JSOTF-Trident was created through FRAGO number 5 to provide command and control to all forces inside the MBA.²⁵⁰ Accordingly, the delegated authority for JSOTF-Trident to manage the fighting inside MBA enabled JTF-Marawi to balance its focus on other aspects of the crisis, such as handling of the logistics, evacuation centers and information operation. JSOTF-Trident provided clearer guidelines for the government forces in the MBA that resulted in faster resolution of the crisis.²⁵¹ The JSOTF Trident issued quadcopter drones to all battalion level units under its command. As per my experience, the issued drones were used for reconnaissance, forward observation for indirect fire, and production of photographic maps.²⁵²

P. GRAND MOSQUE-OBJECTIVE GRANDE

On August 16, the JTG-Vector Commander presented a battle plan for seizing the Grand Mosque (Figure 9).²⁵³ The plan was to outflank the terrorists from the right by the two JSOU3s while the 2SRB provides SBF from the front of Grand Mosque. The next day, JSOU3 forces started to conduct forward passage of line (FPOL) inside the area of operation (AO) of JTG Tiger on the right side of the mosque. 2SRB continued to clear strong points

²⁴⁸ Philippine Army, 29.

²⁴⁹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²⁵⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 31.

²⁵¹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²⁵² The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

²⁵³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 35.

in front of the mosque. 2SRB positioned their troops to provide SBF for the assault of JSOU forces. 4SRB conducted operations to prevent enemy reinforcement from their AO by moving forward, keeping the terrorists occupied.²⁵⁴

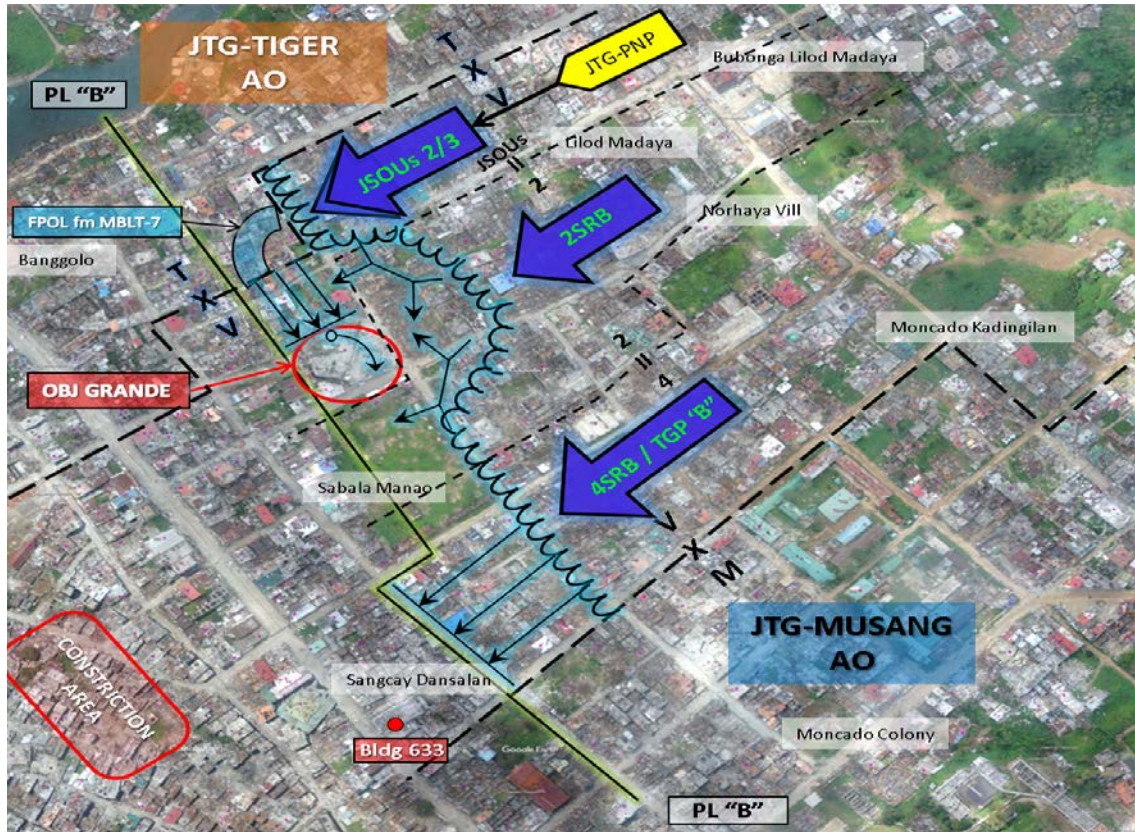


Figure 9. JTG-Vector concept of operation for clearing of Grand Mosque.²⁵⁵

On August 22, the JSOU forces started clearing the neighboring buildings northwest of the Grand Mosque.²⁵⁶ 1LRC crossed the road and assaulted the building closest to their occupied strong point. 1LRC cleared two buildings within the day and turned them over to the students of SFOC134 for occupation. The following day 3LRC

²⁵⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 36.

²⁵⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 35.

²⁵⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report, Grand Mosque Clearing" (Maguindanao, Philippines: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, February 5, 2017), 2.

cleared two more buildings as they moved closer to the mosque.²⁵⁷ From the cleared buildings of 3LRC, 4LRC and CRG, SAF attempted to clear another building to get closer to the mosque.²⁵⁸ 4LRC and CRG, SAF encountered heavy resistance from the terrorists located inside the Grand Mosque and adjacent buildings. The terrorists concentrated their fire towards the location of 4LRC troops. The firefight continued for about an hour until all the troops of 4LRC and CRG, SAF returned to previously cleared buildings. 4LRC and CRG troops decided to soften the buildings occupied by the terrorists overnight in preparation for the assault for the following day.²⁵⁹ SFOC 134 students used indirect fire from grenade launchers and tear gas to weaken the terrorists' resolve to defend the Grand Mosque.²⁶⁰ 2SRB made the same effort to soften resistance at Grand Mosque and at the neighboring buildings at the eastern side of the mosque.²⁶¹ However, the terrorists retaliated using grenade launchers which caused one wounded from the troops of 2SRB and four from the students of SFOC 134.

Early in the morning of August 24, the students of SFOC 134 continued the conduct of softening the buildings from their location northwest of the mosque.²⁶² The troops of 2SRB provided SBF to suppress terrorist fire and prevent terrorist reinforcement towards the Grand Mosque.²⁶³ At about 0800H, the troops of JSOU2 and JSOU3 together with CRG, SAF assaulted simultaneously towards the Grand Mosque.²⁶⁴ 6LRC cleared two adjacent buildings at the north side of the mosque.²⁶⁵ Then, an SF team and armor vehicle, using their M2 .50 caliber machinegun, created a hole in the outer wall of the mosque to

²⁵⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Seizure of Grand Mosque" (Camp Ranao, Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 4.

²⁵⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report, Grand Mosque Clearing," 3.

²⁵⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

²⁶⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Seizure of Grand Mosque," 4.

²⁶¹ Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege," 34.

²⁶² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Seizure of Grand Mosque," 4.

²⁶³ Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege," 34.

²⁶⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 36.

²⁶⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Seizure of Grand Mosque," 4.

create a breaching point for the assaulters. 1LRC cleared three adjacent buildings in the east of the mosque.²⁶⁶ Afterwards, 4LRC and CRG, SAF, took advantage of the progress of 1LRC and cleared three more buildings beside the mosque. At 1134H, 6LRC assaulted the Grand Mosque.²⁶⁷ 6LRC troops crossed open terrain to get inside the mosque. They cleared the basement and the ground floor of the mosque. 1LRC troops followed 6LRC inside the mosque and cleared the upper floors.²⁶⁸ At about 1200H, the Grand Mosque was cleared of terrorist presence.²⁶⁹ The commander of JSOU2 tasked the EOD team to conduct search and recovery of IEDs and UXOs in the area. The EOD team recovered IED, pipe bombs (improvised hand grenade), and 40 mm and 81 mm UXOs. Then 6LRC, 1LRC and 4LRC continued clearing buildings in the vicinity of the mosque. The LRC units turned over the buildings cleared during the day to the students of SFOC 134 and RPSB troops. SFOC 134 and RPSB troops would prevent any attempt by the terrorists to recover the cleared buildings.²⁷⁰

Q. LANDBANK BUILDING- BUILDING 633

On August 27, 4SRB planned the clearing of the buildings surrounding the Landbank Building prior to the attack of the Landbank Building itself.²⁷¹ The Landbank Building was a commanding structure with six floors, and very thick, sturdy walls. The next day, 4SRB troops began to soften the buildings that they planned to clear. Then, by mid-morning 3SRC troops conducted an assault to clear one building to get closer to the Landbank Building. 3SRC troops partially cleared one section of the first floor and the whole second floor of the building. As the troops moved on to clear the second section of the first floor, terrorists counterattacked from the basement. The terrorists effectively

²⁶⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report, Grand Mosque Clearing,” 4.

²⁶⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 36.

²⁶⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report, Grand Mosque Clearing,” 4.

²⁶⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Seizure of Grand Mosque,” 5.

²⁷⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

²⁷¹ Philippine Army, “After Battle Report on C&D/Land Bank Building (633)” (Marawi City: First Scout Ranger Regiment, September 18, 2017), 2.

delayed the clearing of the first floor. In the afternoon, terrorists from another building fired an RPG round at the fourth section of the second floor. The wall collapsed over the troops and exposed the occupants of that area to terrorist fire. The collapsed wall and RPG round wall left the occupants of that area wounded or injured. The troops vacated the building and consolidated in their previously held building.²⁷²

In the days that followed, 4SRB conducted softening of terrorist-occupied buildings to the left of the Landbank Building.²⁷³ 4SRB used 81 mm mortars and other crew-served weapons organic to their unit.²⁷⁴ In addition, 4SRB utilized four armored vehicles and a 105 mm howitzer in softening their targets. The howitzer fired rounds towards the Landbank Building in order to create several openings in the walls to serve as entrances for the assaulters. Furthermore, an FA50 delivered 500-pound bombs to further soften the building. On September 5, while the softening continued for Landbank Building, 4SRB troops conducted an assault to clear four buildings at the south and southeast side of the Landbank Building.²⁷⁵ The terrorists resisted heavily, forcing the troops of 4SRB to pull back. After the assault, 4SRB officers held an AAR. The following day, 4SRB troops continued their softening of the target building using the same armaments with the addition of a V300 armored vehicle with a 90 mm gun. The V300 fired at the Landbank Building, and thus created an access point for the assault by the troops.

On September 10, at about 1015H, an FA50 dropped 500-pound bombs that hit the Landbank Building and two other structures south of it that were critical for the assault of the troops.²⁷⁶ The impact of the bombs and the softening conducted by the troops in the past days made the clearing of 4SRB troops of structures towards the Landbank Building unhindered. 11SRC led the assault. Coming from another building, 11SRC entered the

²⁷² Philippine Army, 4.

²⁷³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 39.

²⁷⁴ Philippine Army, "After Battle Report on C&D/Land Bank Building (633)," 6.

²⁷⁵ Philippine Army, 9.

²⁷⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 40.

Landbank Building via the third floor. The troops used the opening in the wall created by V300 and artillery fire. Then, the troops cleared the fourth floor, fifth floor, and the roof deck without any hardship.²⁷⁷ After the upper floors were cleared, 11SRC troops reorganized and geared for the clearing of the second and ground floors.²⁷⁸ The troops cleared the second floor without resistance. While the troops of 11SRC were on the second floor, 10SRC engaged the terrorists at the ground floor through an opening at the south side of the Landbank Building. 11SRC troops briefly assessed the situation, then attempted to clear the ground floor of the building. The team from 11SRC that went down to the ground floor entered the terrorists' trap. The ground floor only provided limited cover for the troops. They rushed back towards the second floor upon the order of the officer who led them, however one of them was left behind after providing covering fire for the withdrawal of the troops from the ground floor. He was wounded by terrorist fire. 11SRC made several attempts to rescue him but failed. The CO of 11SRC tried to rescue his trapped subordinate, ran toward the location of his subordinate, checked the pulse, and attempted to drag his subordinate to safety. However, the CO was fatally hit by terrorist fire. The ground floor was finally cleared in the morning of the following day after one officer and one enlisted man was killed in action and 28 personnel wounded. Then, 4SRB troops occupied the Landbank Building.²⁷⁹ The Landbank Building was one of the first buildings occupied by JTF-Vector forces along Gomisa Avenue.

R. BATO MOSQUE

To gain access to Bato Mosque, the other troops of JTF-Vector continued to clear buildings towards Gomisa Avenue. Early in the morning of September 16, 6LRC cleared eight buildings that cleared the whole block in front of Bato Mosque.²⁸⁰ This block

²⁷⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 40.

²⁷⁸ Philippine Army, "After Battle Report on C&D/Land Bank Building (633)," 16.

²⁷⁹ Philippine Army, 24.

²⁸⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Sabala Manao Skirmish" (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 8.

includes the Landbank Building.²⁸¹ The CO of 6LRC reported that the assault of Bato Mosque, and the pink building beside it, was already viable.²⁸² The commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 went forward to the location of 6LRC to conduct reconnaissance and confirm the veracity of the report. The report of 6LRC was due to the absence of terrorist activities in the area. Then, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3, together with the commanding officers of the LRC units and the operation officer of 4SRB, held a meeting for planning and coordination of the assault of Bato Mosque.²⁸³ After the plan was conceptualized, the troops made all the necessary preparations.²⁸⁴ The armored vehicles were told to standby and preposition close to the operation. Then, the troops occupied their respective positions to prepare for assault. Lastly, the snipers and the crew-served weapons were placed where they could best support the assigned assaulters. At 1400H, the troops fired tear gas towards the mosque and the buildings beside it.²⁸⁵ The tear gas signaled the commencement of the assault. 6LRC crossed the road and cleared the first floor of the mosque and the pink building beside it. The terrorists started to retaliate when one of them was shot by the sniper of 6LRC.²⁸⁶ The troops of 6LRC engaged the terrorists in a heavy firefight. The terrorists threw pipe bombs at the location of the troops in the pink building, wounding seven of the assaulters. The wounded troops were evacuated from the pink building using armored vehicles. The terrorist retaliation gained momentum at the Bato Mosque, resulting in the death of one 6LRC troop and the wounding of nine other personnel.²⁸⁷ The terrorists burned the building at the western side of Bato Mosque, causing heavy fire and smoke, forcing the troops to withdraw.²⁸⁸

²⁸¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, February 5, 2017), 4.

²⁸² Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 8.

²⁸³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 8.

²⁸⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 4.

²⁸⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

²⁸⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 9.

²⁸⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 9.

²⁸⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 4.

On September 24, the JTG-Vector forces conducted another assault at Bato Mosque.²⁸⁹ The assault was controlled by 4SRB, with the 6LRC and 4LRC attached to them. At 0630H, FA50s delivered 500-pound bombs at the western side of the mosque. Immediately after the bombing run, 4LRC, 6LRC and 10SRC crossed Gomisa Avenue and assaulted Bato Mosque, the pink building, and the building beside the pink building, respectively.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, 2LRC and 3LRC also crossed Gomisa Avenue and cleared five buildings at the adjacent block north of Bato Mosque. 4LRC troops encountered heavy resistance inside the pink building.²⁹¹ The terrorists from the basement detonated IEDs placed under the first floor that caused portions of the floor to collapse.²⁹² The explosions left three troops of 4LRC slightly wounded. On the other hand, 6LRC requested that the EOD team blast the floor to make holes to brighten the basement.²⁹³ The blast did not produce a hole wide enough to illuminate the basement. But 6LRC troops used the hole to drop grenades and tear gas towards the basement instead.²⁹⁴ The terrorists burned another building close to the pink building followed by heavy gunfire in their attempt to recover control of their lost ground.²⁹⁵ However, the armored vehicles foiled the counterattack of the terrorists. Bato Mosque and the pink building were eventually turned over by 4LRC and 6LRC to units of 4SRB.²⁹⁶ On September 28, 4SRB cleared the basement of Bato Mosque and captured several firearms and dead terrorists.²⁹⁷

²⁸⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 44.

²⁹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 44.

²⁹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 6.

²⁹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 45.

²⁹³ Philippine Army, “After Battle Report on Masjid Batoh Ali Block (Building 704)” (Marawi City: First Scout Ranger Regiment, October 30, 2017), 14.

²⁹⁴ Philippine Army, 15.

²⁹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 6.

²⁹⁶ Philippine Army, “After Battle Report on Masjid Batoh Ali Block (Building 704),” 15.

²⁹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 46.

S. CONCLUSION

This chapter narrated how the JSOG forces cleared the sector assigned to them. Their sector included the most important structures utilized by the terrorists as strongholds. This chapter showed the development of the TTPs of JSOG and how firepower and equipment matter in clearing operations. The clearing of Bato Mosque made Gomisa Avenue relatively safe for the government forces. Analysis of the events narrated discovered lessons learned that involves the use of coded maps, vulnerability of armored vehicles in urban areas, ratio of personnel with the width of the sector, diversity of units in a task group, armored vests, importance of being abreast with other units in another sector, tear gas, disadvantage of night operations, captured enemy radios, loudspeaker, EOD teams, suppressive fire, morale of troops, rotation scheme, quadcopter drones, M2 .50 caliber machinegun, importance of armored vehicles and routine and cycle of clearing operations of JTG-Vector during Marawi siege.

Identifying and communicating the locations of troops in urban areas was difficult but higher headquarters issued maps assigning alphanumeric codes for each building that made the identification and communication of locations easier. This system worked well with all government forces during the Marawi siege, as all troops understand and were comfortable using the codes. Therefore, learning from this system that worked successfully, the AFP should adopt alphanumeric codes for each building when conducting urban operations.

The armored vehicles were vulnerable to RPG attack in urban terrain, but the government forces needed to utilize armored vehicles in every operation. One armored vehicle was hit by RPG when tasked to support the first operation of JSOU3 in the MBA. The JTG-Vector forces reduced the vulnerability of the armored vehicles by not allowing the armored vehicles move ahead of the infantry during the siege. Therefore, learning from the utilization of armored vehicles that both succeeded and failed, the armored vehicles should avoid moving ahead of the infantry during urban operations. The infantry and armored vehicles should mutually support each other.

The sector of JTG-Vector was large for JSOU2 and JSOU3 but JTF-Marawi tasked JTG -Tiger to clear half of the sector of JTG-Vector. JTG-Vector had a difficulty in moving forward due to the resistance of the terrorists, number of buildings they must clear and the number of walls they must breach. The timely giving of task to JTG-Tiger to clear the half of the sector of JTG-Vector lessened the burden of the troops in clearing large sector. Therefore, learning from the experience of JTG-Vector in clearing operations the number of personnel deployed should be proportionate to the width of the area to be cleared.

JTG-Vector was the only joint task group in the MBA composed of diverse units coming from two different agencies (AFP and PNP) but all units worked in harmony. The units did not have compatible radio frequencies and some of the officers of SAF-PNP outranked the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3. However, the leadership of JTG-PNP recognized that the lead agency for the crisis was the AFP and abided by the decisions of the more junior JSOU commanders who were on the ground. Also, the basis for the employment of forces were with respect to the capabilities of the units. The assaulters and snipers of SAF-PNP were employed as such. The LRCs relied heavily on the crew-served weapons of SAF for SBF. Therefore, from the experience of JTG-Vector and JTG-PNP, diversity of units should not be a problem in conducting urban operations. The commanders only need to respect the authority and know the capabilities of all the units involved in the operations and use them according to their competencies.

The utilization of FA50s for delivering 500-pound bombs was devastating to the terrorists, but the requirement to move 200 meters away from the target meant abandoning previously occupied buildings and moving back. The terrorists took advantage of the pull-out of troops and conducted counteroffensives, hitting the command group of JSOU2 and JSOU3. In the succeeding FA50 bombing runs, the JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces did not follow the requirement to move back and maintain their location. The troops only selected strong buildings for cover, and they took advantage of the impact of the bombs in their clearing operation. Therefore, learning from the experience of the JSOUs regarding CAS that both succeeded and failed, the requirement to move back does not necessarily mean exactly moving a 200-meter radius from the target of bombing runs. The troops could rely

on the accuracy of the delivery of bombs and hide inside buildings that could provide cover for the troops from the impact of the bombs.

The government forces were vulnerable to terrorist fire when they conducted clearing operations, but the AFP issued them new and reliable armored vests. The terrorists were just waiting for the government troops to be exposed before shooting them. However, those who were shot and hit at their armored vest were saved from severe to deadly injuries. Therefore, learning from the experience of the JTG-Vector forces regarding wearing of armored vests, the troops should wear reliable armored vests in their conduct of urban operations.

There were units that were ahead of other units in clearing their sectors, but those units who were ahead were vulnerable to terrorist fire in their flanks from other sectors. There were a lot of casualties from terrorist fire that came from the other sectors. As much as possible, the troops of JSOUs moved abreast with units from other sectors. If they were able to move ahead, they waited for the other units or helped other units to catch up in their sectors. Therefore, learning from the experience of JSOUs that worked well, when fighting in urban areas units should avoid moving ahead of other units and should maintain moving abreast with other units as much as possible.

The element of surprise was very hard to achieve during the siege, but the JSOU troops used tear gas to outbalance terrorist defenses. The terrorists usually were waiting for the assault of the troops and shot whichever troops came before their sights. The use of tear gas was an effective alternate for the element of surprise to successfully overcome the defenses of the terrorists. Therefore, learning from the success of the troops in using tear gas in their assaults, the use of tear gas should be considered before assaulting the position of the terrorists.

The JSOU troops were equipped and trained to conduct for night operations, but the troops ruled out operating at night. The movement of troops at night will be noisy because the debris of the destroyed buildings will create noise when the troops step on then while approaching their targets. Also, the firearms of JSOU troops were not equipped with flash hiders which made the troops highly visible whenever they fired their weapons. The

JSOU troops only used their night capability when they needed to attain surprise. Therefore, learning from the experience of JSOU forces, the night operations are not always advantageous even if the troops are trained and equipped to do it.

The intelligence support during the siege was limited but the radios of the terrorists provided some of the information needed by the troops. The personnel who understood the terrorists' language monitored and interpreted the conversations of the terrorists through their radios. This provided vital information that helped government troops know some of the plans and locations of the terrorists. Therefore, learning from the experience of the JTG-Vector forces, captured radios from terrorists should be used to monitor their conversations in order to get vital information that may help in future operations.

The CMO teams regularly conducted psychological operations using loudspeakers at night to encourage terrorists to surrender even without results, but the unit songs played by CMO boosted troop morale. The CMO teams failed to get intended results in their operations for months. However, their operations were getting collateral results, that is keeping the spirit of the troops high while they were fighting the terrorist during the siege. Therefore, learning from the CMO operations that both succeeded and failed, psychological operations using loudspeaker should be part of urban operations to try to convince the terrorists to surrender and help in keeping the morale of the troops high.

There were a lot of troop casualties due to the IEDs, but JTG-Vector forces employed EOD teams, together with the assaulters, to deal with the IED threats. IEDs planted by the terrorists wounded or killed troops during the conduct of clearing operations. The EOD teams helped in locating, identifying and defusing IEDs. Therefore, learning from experiences of the JTG-Vector forces in dealing with IEDs, EOD teams should always be with the assaulters to minimize casualties caused by IEDs in urban operations like the Marawi siege.

The troops were vulnerable from terrorist shooters while approaching their target buildings, but JSOU troops shot at every window and hole to suppress the terrorist from shooting at the approaching troops. A lot of casualties resulted when troops transferred from one building to another. The commanders of the LRCs assigned snipers to shoot at

every window or hole in target buildings and the buildings close by while the troops approached their target building. A sniper only fired at the window assigned to him. This tactic minimized the casualties incurred by the JSOU troops while approaching their targets. Therefore, learning from the tactic employed by JSOU troops that both succeeded and failed, to minimize the casualties incurred snipers or marksmen should be assigned to shoot at the most possible positions of terrorist shooters while approaching assigned targets in urban operations.

The clearing of buildings from terrorist presence was a stressful and tiring task, but JTG-Vector forces used rotation schemes so that the troops involved in clearing operations could relax and rest. Higher headquarters considered the stress experienced by the troops in fighting the terrorists. The rotation schemes of JSOU troops were accomplishment-based and one week off rotation scheme. On the accomplishment basis rotation scheme, one LRC needed to clear at least one building before they were replaced by another LRC for the clearing operation for the next day. If the LRC was unable to clear its target building within the day, they returned the next day and the next until they cleared their target. The LRC troop members were eager to clear their target buildings as quickly as possible for them to rest early. For the weekly basis, the LRCs were given one-week rest away from the MBA. Under this scheme, LRC troops were given time to rest longer with the intention to mitigate the possible mental effect of continued combat. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege, higher headquarters should allocate time for troops involved in prolonged fighting to rest.

The leader's reconnaissance of the targets was dangerous and limited, but the issued drones provided a better and safer way for the commanders to conduct reconnaissance. Aside from reconnaissance, drones were also used for forward observing for indirect fire. Drones were also used to provide updated photographic maps for the troops. Therefore, learning from the experiences that both succeeded and failed, units should learn to optimize the uses of quadcopter drones in urban operations.

The M2 .50 caliber machine gun was heavy and an unlikely weapon for the infantry conducting urban operations, but JTG-Vector forces utilized them in their fight against the terrorists. The .50 caliber machine guns were proven to be effective weapons when

positioned inside buildings, usually in a higher floor to deliver fire against the terrorists. It was also proven to be useful as a breaching tool and a better alternate for sledgehammers in making alternate entrances for troops to get inside buildings. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector that succeeded, the M2 .50 caliber machineguns mounted on a tripod should be included in the list weapons for the units conducting urban operations to support the assault of the troops.

The roads were usually unsafe for transport of troops and ammunition and casualty evacuation in urban battle, but government forces utilized armored vehicles for transport in unsafe areas. The armored vehicles provided safe transport for troops, ammunition, and casualty evacuation during Marawi siege. In addition, they provided necessary fire power to support the operation of the troops. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector during the siege, the AFP should optimize the utilization of armored vehicles in urban operations.

The operations conducted by JTG-Vector lasted for months, but the actions of the units became routine. The clearing operations of the sector of JTG-Vector was slowly done. The operations started with assessment of the target and planning for the operation. The planning and assessment phase involved leader's reconnaissance and drone reconnaissance. The result of the reconnaissance was the basis of the plan for the assault. The next phase was softening or saturation fire towards the target building. Softening sometimes involved aerial bombing, artillery, mortar, and machine-gun fire. Softening may be skipped or optional depending on the assessment of the company commanders tasked to assault the target. The commanders skipped to prevent unnecessary destruction of buildings. It should be better to occupy and defend an intact building, hence, the troops avoided destroying buildings unnecessarily. The usual weapons used for softening were the M2 .50 caliber machine guns issued to JSOUs and battalions. Aerial bombing, artillery and mortar fire were subject to availability and approval of higher headquarters.

The assault of JSOU troops usually began with tear gas fired at their target buildings followed by suppressive fire to windows and loopholes that prevented terrorists from returning fire against government forces. The actual assaults were done while tear gas was still effective and while the terrorists still suffered from the effects. The troops of the SRBs

did not use tear gas during their assaults and commenced their assaults while suppressing terrorist fire. The assaulters cleared the building from the terrorist presence before they started the next phase.

The next phase was site exploitation. Site exploitation usually started while the EOD cleared the building of IEDs. Then the troops looked for radios, mobile phones and other materials which had intelligence value.

Then, the last phase was the occupation. For the JSOU troops, the LRCs who assaulted the building were relieved by the students of SFOC 134. The LRC troops rested after the clearing operation and the SFOC 134 students occupied and guarded the recently cleared building. For the SRB troops, the troops who cleared the building occupied, fortified and defended the building that they had recently cleared from the terrorist counterattack. The CMO teams usually brought their loudspeaker to the newly cleared buildings for psychological operations. Then another cycle for another target was performed by the troops. The duration of the cycle depended on the duration of the clearing of the building. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector forces that both succeeded and failed, this routine could be useful as a guide for the tactical commanders of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in case of future urban operations with the same nature as Marawi siege. The next chapter will be the narrative of the final phase of clearing operations in the sector of JTG-Vector.

V. FROM GOMISA AVENUE TO LAKE LANAO

A. INTRODUCTION

Gomisa Avenue, a main road in Marawi City, is described as wide and open.²⁹⁸ The JTF-Vector troops who first attempted to cross this road was 6LRC. This was during their first attempt to capture the Bato Mosque.²⁹⁹ The attempt was futile and 6LRC was forced back to the other side of the road.³⁰⁰ JTG-Vector cleared its sector which started from the sector of 2SRB; then, the sector of two JSOU's followed, and lastly, the sector of 4SRB, which highlights the vulnerability of the terrorists from their flank. Also, government forces rescued hostages, which showed the importance of psychological operations and utilization of quadcopter drones in urban operations.

This chapter will narrate the final phase of the clearing of the sector assigned to JTF-Vector. Furthermore, the chapter describes how JTF-Vector dealt with crossing roads, a dangerous task for the troops. This chapter also tackles one of the important results of psychological operations conducted during the crisis. Finally, this chapter will narrate the final battle and the last phase of clearing of the sector of JTF-Vector.

B. BUILDING 500

The commander of 2SRB expected the buildings at the other side of Gomisa Avenue to be well-fortified by the terrorists.³⁰¹ 2SRB conducted two feint attacks before assaulting the buildings across the street. At about 0800H of September 18, 2SRB troops and other support elements simultaneously fired at the front of these buildings. Then, at about 0840H, the troops pulled back to safer locations, expecting their feint attack to have drawn terrorist reinforcements. Then, at about 0850H, two FA50 jets delivered four 500-pound bombs at the target buildings. After an hour, news that there were several terrorist

²⁹⁸ Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege," 42.

²⁹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish," 4.

³⁰⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Sabala Manao Skirmish," 9.

³⁰¹ Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege," 42.

casualties due to bombs was monitored by JTF Marawi's signal intelligence. The next day, 2SRB troops conducted similar attacks on the same buildings. The second feint attack, conducted by 2SRB with SAF, PNP and armored vehicles carrying a 76 mm gun and an M2 .50-caliber machine gun as support, took place at about 0800H, similar to the time of the first feint attack. When the troops assessed that the attack had drawn terrorists to reinforce the defenders of the target buildings, the armored vehicle with the 76 mm gun fired several rounds at the location of the terrorists. Again, JTF-Marawi monitored that the terrorists suffered more casualties as a result of the second feint attack.

On September 20, 2SRB started the attack earlier (Figure 10).³⁰² At about 0430H, all units of 2SRB and the units supporting them commenced a thirty-minute preparation fire. 6SRC, who executed FPOL in the sector of JTF-Tiger and prepositioned in a building at the right flank of their target, conducted the assault at about 0500H. One section of 6SRC crossed the road and cleared the building closest to their attack position. 6SRC troops easily cleared the building as it was not defended by the terrorists. Furthermore, 6SRC troops continued their assault to the next building which was the tallest in the vicinity. One troop was wounded during the firefight as they pushed the clearing of the first floor. 6SRC troops cleared the first floor of the building as the terrorists were forced to withdraw. They cleared the upper floors without resistance and found four rifles during the operation. 6SRC seized the tallest building that was advantageous position for snipers and machine gun crews. 2SRB pushed forward and cleared two more buildings within the morning of the day.³⁰³

³⁰² Philippine Army, 44.

³⁰³ Philippine Army, 45.



Figure 10. 2SRB sketch in seizure of Objective 500.³⁰⁴

C. JSOU2 AND JSOU3’S CROSSING OF GOMISA AVENUE

After the failed attempt to cross Gomisa Avenue, JSOU2 and JSOU3 forces decided to complete the clearing of all buildings of the block in their sector before attempting to cross the main road again. On September 17, 4LRC cleared one building along Gomisa Avenue which was found at the north corner of the block.³⁰⁵ Then, 4LRC troops abandoned the building because they would be vulnerable to terrorist counterattack if they occupied it. The following days were spent on planning and preparation for the assault of buildings at the other side of the road. On September 21, 1LRC troops returned to the building previously cleared by 4LRC and fortified it. They planned to use it for the crossing of Gomisa Avenue. The following day, JSOU troops together with SAF, PNP continued to soften the buildings at the other side of the road. In the morning of September 24, just after an FA50 bombing, the troops of the JSOU units cleared five buildings after crossing the road. Then, the troops provided SBF that helped in preventing the terrorists from massing

³⁰⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 47.

³⁰⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report of Sabala Manao Skirmish,” 4.

up against the troops who assaulted the Bato Mosque.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, the psychological operations continued to broadcast messages in Maranao, Magindanaoan, and Tausug, which were languages understood by the terrorists and hostages. The messages included instructions to the hostages of what to do if they escaped the terrorists.³⁰⁷ As per my experience, the speaker announced a mobile phone number that the terrorists or the hostages could contact in case of surrender or escape.³⁰⁸ In addition, the message instructed that they should wave a white flag before coming out. The psychological operations also became an entertainment to the troops because the speaker included humor in his messages. Also, every morning, the CMO teams played the songs of respective units of the AFP like the Scout Ranger song, Special Forces song, Philippine Army Hymn and other songs to boost the morale of the troops in fighting the terrorists.³⁰⁹

D. WHITE FLAG

On October 1, while all forces of JTF Vector continued to clear their respective sectors after crossing Gomisa Avenue, a troop member of SAF, PNP observed a white flag being waved from one building in a terrorist-held area.³¹⁰ The troop member of SAF, PNP immediately relayed the observation over the radio which was heard by the two JSOU commanders. The commanders requested ceasefire of all units in the MBA. The waving of a white flag and the activities of the terrorists observed by the troops was interpreted as a gesture of surrender.³¹¹ All units under JTG- Vector were instructed to cease fire in order to address the gesture.³¹² However, fire from the left flank of the terrorists persisted, thus,

³⁰⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

³⁰⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Sabala Manao Skirmish," 13.

³⁰⁸ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

³⁰⁹ The author was the commander of JSOU3 during the Marawi Siege.

³¹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Lumber Skirmish" (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 4.

³¹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

³¹² Philippine Army, "After Operation Report-Marawi Siege," 49.

no breakthrough on terrorist surrender or hostage release happened.³¹³ Then, the commander of JSOU2, together with personnel of CMO, used the loudspeaker to further engage the terrorists to surrender and the hostages to escape. Government forces sent drones to observe the area and took footage of three women pleading for help. The government forces sent another drone that carried a mobile phone to the three women. The phone was used to communicate with the women and coordinate their escape. In the evening night, the three escaped, bringing with them other hostages and they were eventually rescued by the government forces.³¹⁴

E. JTG-VECTOR SECTOR CLEARED

In a conference held by JTF-Trident, the commander asked the battalion commanders for an estimated time frame for ending the crisis.³¹⁵ The battalion commander of 2SRB replied with assurance that he could clear his sector by October 10. As a result, JTF-Vector was given until October 10 to clear the remaining terrorist-held buildings within its sector (Figure 11). The next day, October 1, 2SRB, 4SRB and the two JSOU units commenced the clearing of the remaining terrorist-held areas within their sector. The cleared sector of JTG-Tiger, found to the right of 2SRB, provided room for maneuver for the troops to outflank the terrorists.³¹⁶

The troops of 2SRB cleared six buildings from October 2–5.³¹⁷ 2SRB troops effectively used the armored vehicles for SBF to suppress the terrorist counterattacks. The buildings with tactical values were occupied and fortified with machine guns to support the clearing operations of the troops. The terrorist defenses within the area of 2SRB was weakened upon control of one important building that was used by the terrorists as a machine gun nest. On October 6, 2SRB troops again utilized the armored vehicles for SBF

³¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Lumber Skirmish,” 4.

³¹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

³¹⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 50.

³¹⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 50.

³¹⁷ Philippine Army, “After Operation Report-Marawi Siege,” 50–53.

and cleared eleven building. The troops of JSOU2 and JSOU3, simultaneously with 2SRB, cleared eleven buildings from October 2–6.³¹⁸

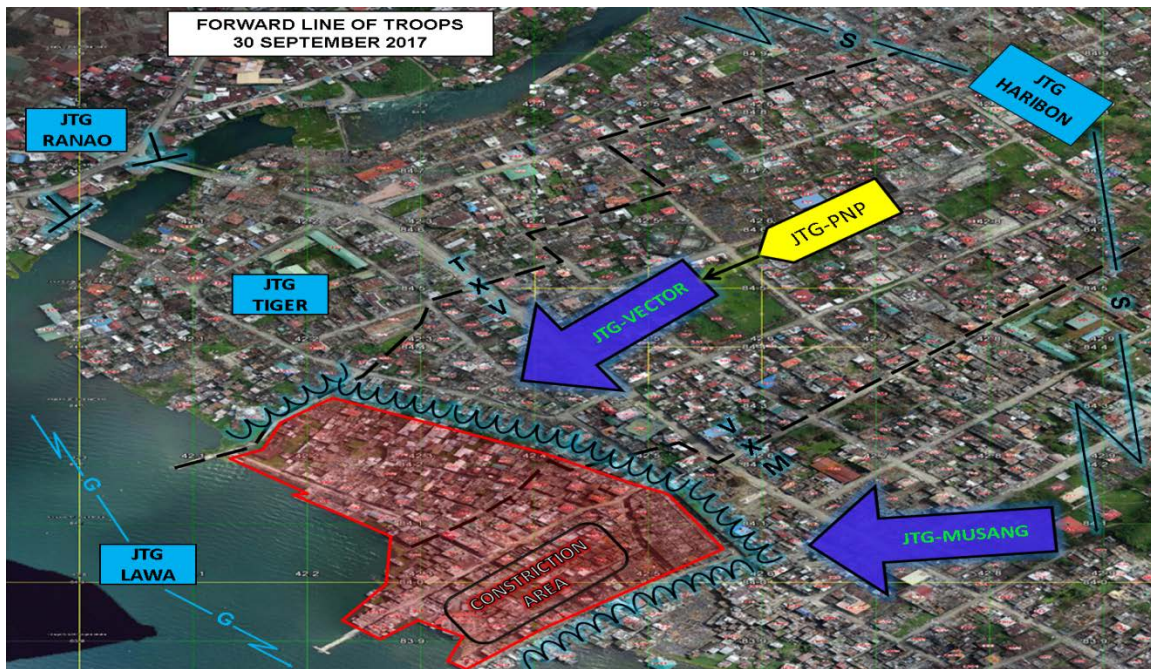


Figure 11. The remaining terrorist-controlled area as of September 30, 2017.³¹⁹

In the final days of clearing the sector, JTG-Vector used an envelopment tactic.³²⁰ On October 7, 2SRB cleared the last ten buildings within their sector.³²¹ With this accomplishment, the unit distinguished themselves as the first battalion of the Philippine Army to declare their sector cleared prior to the deadline set by higher headquarters. The accomplishment of 2SRB allowed the units under JSOU2 and JSOU3 to conduct forward passage of line in their sector.³²² On October 8, the troops of JSOU2 and JSOU3, with the

³¹⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report, Lumber Skirmish” (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, February 5, 2017), 4–5; Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Lumber Skirmish,” 5–7.

³¹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 49.

³²⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 50.

³²¹ Philippine Army, “After Operation Report-Marawi Siege,” 54.

³²² Philippine Army, 54.

support of the troops of JTG-PNP and SFOC 134, cleared eighteen buildings within their sector.³²³ At about 1400H, JSOU2 and JSOU3 troops accomplished their mission of clearing their sector.³²⁴ At about 1500H, SFOC 134 and RPSB troops occupied the frontline buildings. On October 9, the companies under 4SRB cleared the remaining buildings within their sector.³²⁵ Moreover, the achievement of 4SRB on October 9 completed the mission of JTG-Vector, the clearing of their assigned sector. JTF-Vector's accomplishment of their mission further weakened the defenses of the terrorists. Finally, the terrorists retreated towards the government forces' designated constriction area (Figure 12).³²⁶



Figure 12. The concept of operation of JTG-Vector in the final phase of clearing the sector.³²⁷

³²³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Lumber Skirmish," 8.

³²⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report, Lumber Skirmish," 5.

³²⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 51.

³²⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 51.

³²⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 49.

F. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the way in which JTF-Vector forces dealt with the critical task of crossing open terrain prior to the assault of a given target. This chapter also narrated the importance of psychological operations in resolving the crisis. Lastly, this chapter narrated the last phase of clearing of the sector of JTF-Vector. Analysis of the events narrated discovered lessons learned that involves the use of deception, psychological operations, and quadcopter drones.

Surprise was difficult to achieve during the Marawi siege when the enemy was expecting an attack, but the 2SRB conducted feint attacks to deceive the terrorists and achieved surprise in their attack. The terrorists were conditioned of the usual time of attack of the 2SRB for two days. Then at the third day the attack was conducted earlier followed by clearing of the buildings. The terrorists were unable to defend their stronghold and their weapons were found unattended when 2SRB attacked. Therefore, learning from the experiences of 2SRB that succeeded, feint and deception could be good tactics in order to achieve surprise in urban operation with the same nature as the Marawi siege.

Psychological operations did not produce any results for months; however, when they were conducted persistently, they produced results that led to the rescue of several hostages. The CMO teams announced through the loudspeaker the instructions on how to surrender or to come out. The hostages might have heard the instructions and bravely waved a white cloth and they were rescued. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTF-Vector forces that succeeded psychological operations should be part of future urban operations of the AFP.

There was no way to properly communicate with the hostages while they were inside the terrorist-controlled area, but government forces used quadcopter drones to deliver a mobile phone to them. The government forces tied a mobile phone in a drone and delivered them to the hostages inside the terrorist-controlled area. The mobile phone was used to communicate and coordinate the escape and rescue of the hostages. The hostages safely reached the government-controlled area. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTF-Vector forces that succeeded, there were many practical uses of quadcopter drones

that could be exploited; thus, quadcopter drones should be issued to the troops conducting urban operations. These lessons could be valuable for the future urban operations of the AFP. The next chapter narrates the support operation of JSOU2 and JSOU3 in neutralizing the leaders of the terrorists, the rescue of the remaining hostages, and the subsequent clearing of the final objective in Marawi City.

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VI. THE LIBERATION OF MARAWI CITY

A. INTRODUCTION

JTG Vector accomplished its mission of clearing its assigned sector earlier than the given deadline.³²⁸ The remaining terrorists were forced to withdraw towards the constriction area which was in the sector of JTG-Musang. With that, JTF-Trident tasked JTG-Vector to provide troops to support JTG-Musang in the final phase of the battle (Figure 13). JTG-Vector sent JSOU2 and JSOU3 together with SAF, PNP, in consideration of the group's cohesiveness that was developed in the earlier phase of battle of Marawi City, to support JTG-Musang.³²⁹ The JSOU2 and JSOU3 transfer to another sector once again highlighted the problem of communications for the joint and combined operation. The government forces' rescue of hostages emphasized the importance of psychological operations and negotiations in urban operations. The sniper, who displayed persistence in watching his assigned sector, neutralized the leaders of the terrorists.

This chapter will narrate how the troops of JTG-Vector helped in the rescue of the hostages and neutralized the two leaders of the terrorists who attacked Marawi City in one sector of JTG-Musang in Padian Alfa block. Lastly, this chapter will relate the role of JTF-Vector forces in ending the battle of Marawi in Padian Bravo block.

³²⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 51.

³²⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 52.

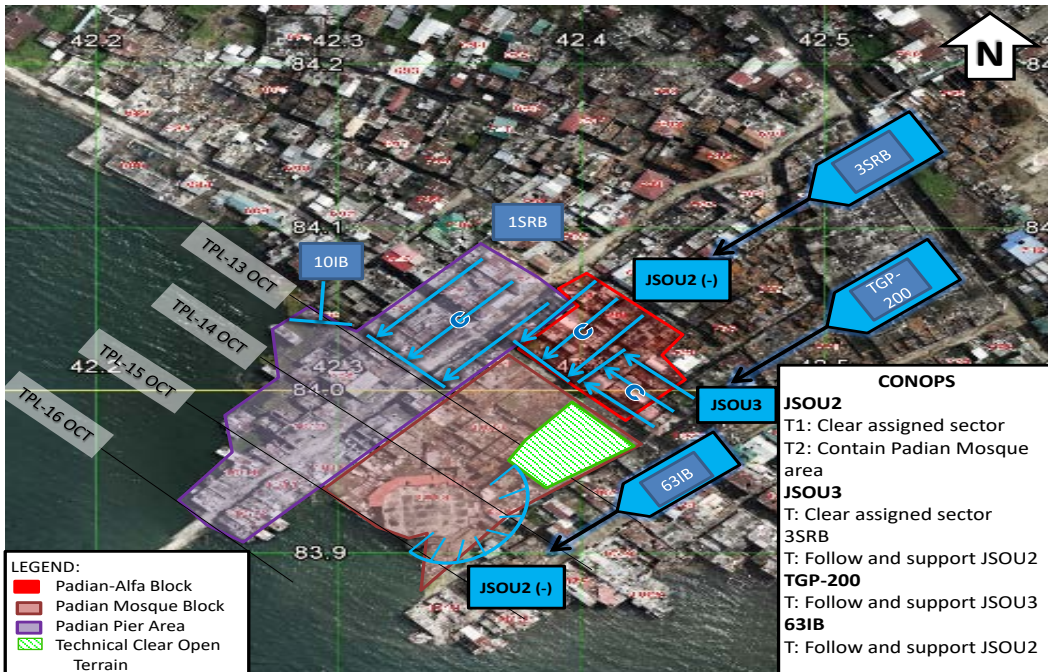


Figure 13. JTG-Vector concept of operations to support JTG-Musang.³³⁰

B. PADIAN ALFA

On October 9, the JTG-Vector Commander issued a warning order for JSOU2 and JSOU3, their LRC units, SFOC 134, and TG-PNP to prepare for possible deployment to the sector of JTG-Musang.³³¹ Then, after a series of meetings for coordination, JTG Vector deployed 2LRC to help in containing and preventing the escape of the terrorists in the area of Padian Mosque on October 10. On October 12, JTF-Trident ordered JTG-Vector to support the clearing of Padian-Alfa. The following day, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 coordinated with the commander of 3SRB while the commanding officers of 1LRC, 6LRC and 4LRC with CRG, SAF visited previously cleared buildings in Padian-Alfa for leaders' reconnaissance. Lastly, the troops of TG-PNP and SFOC 134 redeployed

³³⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 53.

³³¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Padian Skirmish" (Marawi City: Joint Special Operations Group, Armed Forces of the Philippines, January 31, 2018), 2.

their crew-served weapons to buildings where they could best support the clearing of the rest Padian-Alfa.³³²

On October 14, after an FA50 bombing, the troops of JTG Vector and 3SRB of JTG-Musang used the buildings occupied by the troops at the left side of the block as the starting point of the clearing operations in Padian-Alfa (Figure 14).³³³ JTG-Vector troops immediately cleared four buildings in the morning (E82, E82A and B, E81A and B). The troops of 3SRB also cleared and occupied three buildings within the Padian-Alfa block (J26, E77 and E77C). Then in the afternoon, 6LRC troops cleared more buildings in the middle of the block and neutralized two terrorists in the process. 1LRC also cleared one building (790) in the middle of the block to support 6LRC's effort. As the troops of 6LRC moved to clear another building (I26A), they heard women and children screaming for help. They estimated these to be coming from one of three buildings (I26B, 780A or 790C) in the middle of the block. The voices constrained the troops from firing their weapons, especially the crew-served weapons. The troops tried to determine the location of the screams and prepared for a possible rescue operation. Then, 6LRC troops used a megaphone to communicate with the hostages using the Visayan language. 6LRC troops provided guidelines and encouraged the hostages to escape. As a result, one female hostage escaped. The troops asked the escapee to encourage more hostages to come out. Through interrogation, the escapee revealed the presence of the two top leaders of the terrorists within the block, the location of the hostages as well as the location of the terrorists, and other information needed for planning and accomplishment of the tasks of the government troops. 6LRC attempted to clear another building to try to rescue more hostages. However, the terrorists retaliated and hit the leg of one personnel of 6LRC. Three troops, who went ahead to clear another building, were cut off and trapped by terrorist fire. 6LRC tried to extricate the trapped personnel by throwing smoke grenades to conceal the extrication. 1LRC supported the extrication by also throwing smoke grenades. Two of the personnel of 1LRC were wounded in the process. In the evening, the troops were extricated from danger.

³³² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

³³³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

After the evacuation of the wounded, the troops of JTG-Vector turned over the cleared buildings to 3SRB troops for relief-in-place and left the area to prepare for the continuation of the mission the next day.³³⁴

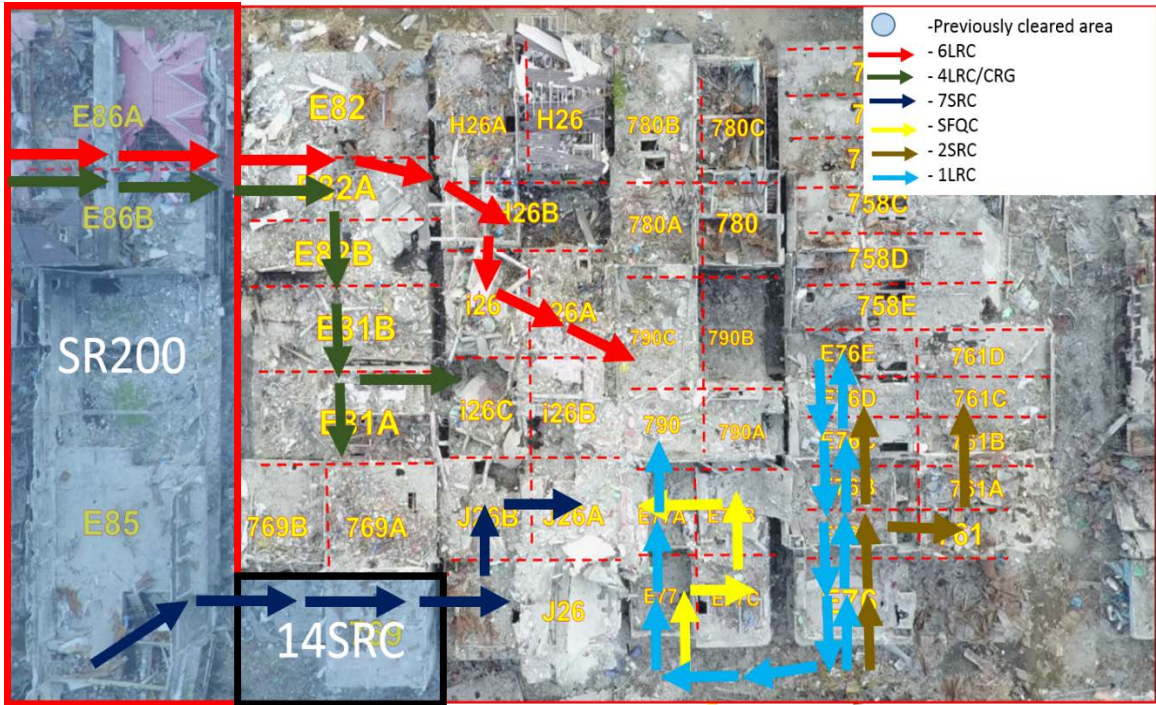


Figure 14. Movement of JTG-Vector forces and 3SRB.³³⁵

C. NEUTRALIZATION OF ISNILON HAPILON AND OMAR KHAYAM MAUTE

In the morning of October 15, as the troops of JTG-Vector returned to the area, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 learned that another female hostage and a terrorist came out from the block and were held by the Scout Ranger troops.³³⁶ The second female hostage confirmed the revelation of the first female hostage that the two top leaders of the

³³⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.
³³⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi),” 54.
³³⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “After Battle Report- Padian Skirmish,” 5.

terrorists were in the Padian-Alfa block. Thus, the knowledge of the presence of the terrorist leaders in the vicinity inspired the troops to work harder to clear the block. The troops considered in their plan the primacy of the rescue of the hostages over the neutralization of the terrorist leaders.³³⁷

By noon, after a psychological operations flight of FA50s over the targets, the troops of JTG-Vector retook control of the buildings they left to the troops of 3SRB and continued their operation.³³⁸ The softening of the remaining target buildings continued. Every time the troops heard the shouts of the hostages, they utilized a megaphone to persuade the hostages to escape. Furthermore, the troops also brought previous escapees to the front to help in persuading the terrorists to yield and the remaining hostages to run away. In addition, the troops also utilized the loudspeaker of the CMO teams. They permitted a troop who could speak the local language to communicate with the terrorists and hostages. They also allowed the terrorist who surrendered to call out the names of the terrorists one by one in an effort to convince them to surrender. Lastly, the second female escapee also tried to convince the other hostages to escape towards the location of the soldiers.³³⁹

The leaders of JTG-Vector troops involved in the clearing of Padian-Alfa block decided to continue the operation overnight to take advantage of the new developments in the operation against the terrorists.³⁴⁰ As darkness fell, the troops used chemical lights to illuminate the area close to the building where the screams of the hostages originated. Then, the troops used a flashlight attached to a pole to provide light for the machine gun crew who were trying to break the wall gradually. Then, the troops used tear gas to make the terrorists uneasy inside their stronghold. The flashlight was replaced by emergency light and then replaced by a spotlight big enough to light up the area where the troops were conducting the operation. The troops used the spotlight at about 2000H, cautiously

³³⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

³³⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

³³⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

³⁴⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

avoiding the illumination of the other government forces. The light helped the troops in observing the activities in the area. Also, the light helped the troops in identifying the hostages from the terrorists. The troops continued the pressure using tear gas and continued breaking the wall of the stronghold of terrorists in Padian-Alfa. The troops also provided instructions through the megaphone for the hostages to follow the chemical lights and the spotlight as an escape route towards the government troops.³⁴¹

At about 0130H of October 16, the momentary silence in Padian area was broken when successive single gunshots were overheard within the area.³⁴² The commanding officer of 6LRC asked over the radio where the shots came from. The commanding officer of 4LRC later acknowledged that a sniper from 4LRC took the shots (Figure 15). He revealed that there were terrorists who crossed the road towards the Padian-Mosque block. Out of seven who crossed, the sniper neutralized three. The sniper confirmed the neutralization saying that the bodies of those he neutralized were still lying along the road that separated the Padian-Alfa block from the Padian-Mosque block. The commanding officer of 4LRC confessed that he scolded the sniper who took the shots because of the low hit percentage. He warned the snipers to be more vigilant. The snipers acknowledged the guidance of their commanding officer.³⁴³

³⁴¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

³⁴² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

³⁴³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 8.



Figure 15. Sniper team's location and the bodies of the two terrorist leaders.³⁴⁴

At about 0300H, several women and children hostages attempted to move towards the light, with some of them communicating to the troops of 6LRC their intentions.³⁴⁵ However, when they were about to move, the terrorists prevented them as one of the terrorists loaded his rifle. The hostages heard the sound which caused them to hesitate to escape. 6LRC troops persisted in convincing the hostages to come out which resulted in three female hostages being rescued. One of them was wounded in the chest. The hostages were taken by the doctor and nurses of TG-PNP for proper treatment. The troops observed that the terrorists, together with the remaining hostages, left their stronghold at Padian-Alfa and moved towards the direction of the Padian Mosque block. The commanding officer of 4LRC relocated the spotlight to brighten the road. The light helped the snipers differentiate the hostages from the terrorists as they crossed the road. The troops were given orders for selective firing and the automatic fire was ordered to stop in order to avoid the shooting of hostages. The troops of 4LRC and 6LRC observed that those who came out and crossed

³⁴⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Operation Liberation (Battle of Marawi)," 55.

³⁴⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "After Battle Report- Padian Skirmish," 8.

the road were women in hijabs and children only, thus, the snipers held themselves from firing a shot. In hindsight, the commanding officer of 4LRC analyzed that the terrorists might have dressed as women.

At daybreak, the bodies of the terrorists shot by the sniper of 4LRC earlier were recovered by the government troops. Two of the three bodies were found to be the top two leaders of the terrorists. After more than two days of fighting, JTG-Vector troops finished the clearing of Padian-Alfa.

D. PADIAN MOSQUE BLOCK—THE TERRORIST’S LAST STAND

While the clearing of Padian-Alfa was ongoing, the troops of 63IB, with the students of SR Class 200, also conducted an assault at the stronghold of the terrorists at the vicinity of Padian Mosque.³⁴⁶ On October 14, SR class 200 students spearheaded the assault at Padian Mosque with 3LRC troops providing SBF and sniper cover and 2LRC acting as QRF. JTG-Vector tasked 2LRC, 3LRC to support JTG-Musang in the clearing of Padian Mosque Block (Padian-Bravo). The assault did not go well as it resulted in casualties to government troops. There were personnel who were trapped or missing inside the mosque that needed to be rescued. On October 17, the night after the clearing of Padian-Alfa, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 went to the TCP of 63rd Infantry Battalion to check the situation of the troops of 2LRC, 3LRC and the students of SFOC 134. The terrorists staged a counterattack, leaving ten troops of 63IB wounded. 2LRC troops and SFOC 134 students repelled the attack and neutralized two terrorists in the process.³⁴⁷

On October 18, the commanders of JSOU2 and JSOU3 exercised command and control over the troops of 2LRC, 3LRC troops and SFOC 134 from the TCP of 63IB, close to the site of operation.³⁴⁸ In the afternoon, 2LRC and SFOC 134 troops engaged the terrorists in a firefight. The snipers of 2LRC neutralized fourteen terrorists while SFOC 134 neutralized one terrorist. At night, two SFOC 134 students conducted psychological

³⁴⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 4.

³⁴⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

³⁴⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 11.

operations using a loudspeaker. The following morning, the psychological operations gained results as one terrorist contacted the government troops through a third party and asked for a ceasefire. The government troops asked for the release of hostages. The JTG-PNP provided an officer who was an expert in negotiations. The terrorists initially released two female hostages who were rescued by 2LRC and SFOC 134. One of the hostages was given medical attention and the other one remained in the TCP of 63IB for debriefing. More hostages were later released as the negotiator went to talk to the terrorist face-to-face. While the hostages were being released, all of a sudden, a firefight erupted, preventing the continuation of the negotiation. The government forces resumed the clearing operation in Padian Mosque block due to failed negotiations. On October 22, the bodies of the missing students of SR Class 200 were found by the troops of 3LRC. On October 25, the JTG Vector troops were relieved by the 63IB troops in the buildings they occupied, and they left the Padian Mosque block in preparation for send-off. On October 26, the JTG-Vector troops left Marawi City and went to Manila in order to prepare for the security tasks for the ASEAN Summit 2017.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter narrated the support provided by JTG-Vector to JTG-Musang. This effort contributed to the ending of the crisis. This chapter also narrated the neutralization of the two top leaders of the terrorists that attacked Marawi City in one sector of JTG-Musang and the rescue of hostages using loudspeaker. Analysis of the events narrated revealed lessons learned that involve communication, psychological operations, rescue of hostages, and negotiations.

JSOU forces and 3SRB used different radio frequencies but the JTG-PNP lent their extra radios to both units that enabled JSOU and 3SRB forces to communicate directly with each other. JTG-PNP have extra radios in their inventory that enabled them to bridge the communication gaps between operating units. Based on the communication gap experience during the Marawi siege, there should be extra radios for the operating units who were frequently involved in joint and combined operations.

The terrorists tried to escape from the block that JSOU forces and 3SRB were clearing, but the commander of 4LRC deployed snipers to the escape route of the terrorists. Only one of the snipers was able to shoot and hit only three of the seven who tried to escape. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector forces that both succeeded and failed, the possible escape route should be guarded but should not be blocked, to allow the terrorists to come out.

The troops were unable to identify hostages in the dark, so they lit the area with a spotlight. The light helped the troops identify the hostages in the dark. The light also served as a marker for the escape route of the hostages. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector forces that succeeded, troops employing light at night can be helpful and not a tactical violation for a hostage rescue mission.

There were no communications between terrorists and government forces, but the terrorists contacted one of the troops through a third party and started negotiating. The negotiation resulted in the release of hostages. The negotiations collapsed when a firefight suddenly erupted. Therefore, learning from the experiences of JTG-Vector forces that both succeeded and failed, the government forces should be open for the negotiations in fighting the terrorists, but they should always be alert in case of any eventuality just like what happened when the negotiation collapsed. These lessons learned came from the success of the operations of AFP during Marawi siege. The next chapter will analyze the lessons learned from the operations conducted by JTG-Vector forces.

VII. ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION

The Marawi siege was a challenging test for the urban warfare capability of the AFP. At the beginning of the crisis, JTG-Vector forces suffered setbacks in their operations against the terrorists starting from failing to capture the leader of ISIS-Philippines, to failing to rescue the trapped crew of armored vehicles in one of the barangays of Marawi City. The lessons from these setbacks included the loss of lives of personnel of JTG-Vector and the cost of damaged equipment.

However, these setbacks also made JTG-Vector correct its previous mistakes and turned the tide of the battle into success. The adjustments were not necessarily perfect, but they brought the efforts of the JTG-Vector to victory. The successes and failures of the JTG-Vector during Marawi siege brought a significant number of lessons learned for the improvement of the AFP's urban warfare capability.

This chapter analyzes the lessons learned from the operations of JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege. The analysis of the lessons learned will determine the materiel and TTP that the Armed Forces of the Philippines needs to improve on to prepare for future urban operations. The doctrine of the United States Armed Forces will be used as the standard in the comparison for the lessons learned for the improvement of the capability of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in urban warfare. This chapter will provide recommendations for the procurement of additional materiel and adaption of TTP that will make the AFP better prepared for urban operations in the future.

B. MATERIEL

The Marawi siege unraveled the deficiency of the units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to communicate effectively during joint and combined operations. Troops involved in joint and combined operations, especially in urban areas, should be able to communicate with one another to enhance the probability of mission success, and to avoid fratricide. The United States Armed Forces also faces challenges in communications in urban terrain. According to the Joint Publication, *Joint Urban Operations* (JP 3-06),

decentralization is one of the challenges to communications because of the complexity of the urban environment.³⁴⁹ In urban operations, it is challenging to maintain situational awareness and develop a common understanding of the operational area. According to JP 3-06, urban operations necessitate the capability of the troops to communicate quickly to address decentralization problems that are natural in urban operations. Therefore, the AFP should consider providing additional radios for units that are frequently involved in joint and combined operations so that these units can provide radios to those conducting operations with them to offer a quick solution to communication gaps.

The Marawi siege also showed the importance of armored vehicles when fighting in urban terrain. Government forces relied heavily on armored vehicles for fire support, maneuver, and evacuation of wounded during the Marawi siege. The utilization of armored vehicles provided the necessary firepower to support the clearing operations of the troops. Also, armored vehicles were instrumental in safely transporting the troops across open terrain toward their targets. Lastly, the armored vehicles were instrumental in the evacuation of wounded from the front-line. The U.S. Army, in their field manual for urban operations, considers the use of armored vehicles to securely transport critical supplies, and for casualty evacuation.³⁵⁰ Also, the U.S. Army recognizes the vulnerability of armored vehicles to anti-armored weapons in an urban environment. Therefore, in order to improve its urban warfare capabilities, the AFP should consider providing armored vehicles to units frequently conducting urban operations. The AFP should also consider additional protection for the armored vehicles against anti-armor weapons like RPGs to reduce their vulnerability in close combat in urban operations.

The JTG-Vector forces learned how to maximize the uses of M2 .50 caliber machine guns in urban terrain. The portability and maneuverability of the M2 mounted on a tripod provided JSOU2, JSOU3, and JTG-PNP the needed firepower for SBF. The U.S.

³⁴⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Urban Operations," JP 3-06 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 20, 2013), IV-4, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_06.pdf.

³⁵⁰ Department of the Army, "Urban Operations," FM 3-06 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 26, 2006), 10-15, 10-19, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-06.pdf>.

Army recognizes the importance of firepower in achieving tempo in urban operations.³⁵¹ Adequate firepower should be in harmony with speed and security of offensive operations in urban terrain. Also, U.S. Army soldiers involved in urban operations are expected to handle their units' crew-served weapons.³⁵² Therefore, the AFP should consider the procurement of additional .50 caliber machine guns and corresponding ammunition. Also, refresher training for handling and maintenance of .50 caliber machine guns for all troops involved in urban operations should be conducted.

The troops learned from the way that quadcopter drones were utilized during the siege. The capabilities of the drones were instrumental for producing photographic maps, conducting reconnaissance, forward observation, and delivering mobile phones to the hostages. Its many uses helped improve the performance of the JTG-Vector troops in planning and conducting operations during the Marawi siege. According to the field manual of the U.S. Army, their tactical units utilize unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and other ISR equipment to gather information for situational awareness.³⁵³ The U.S. Army uses UAS for aerial reconnaissance to identify danger areas and to select routes for ground reconnaissance. Therefore, the AFP should consider the procurement of more quadcopter drones and making them organic equipment of the units that frequently conduct operations in urban areas.

The JSOU troops also learned the effectiveness of tear gas in limiting the ability of the terrorists to defend their strongholds. The effects of tear gas made the clearing of the buildings less risky for the troops. The use of tear gas is prohibited internationally in wars, but for law enforcement purposes, it is allowed.³⁵⁴ Worldwide, the use of tear gas remains controversial, but the U.S. Senate approved the use of tear gas for military operations in

³⁵¹ Department of the Army, 7–5.

³⁵² Department of the Army, 1–10.

³⁵³ Department of the Army, 5–9.

³⁵⁴ Jorge L. Ortiz, “Tear Gas: ‘Harsh, Terrifying’ and Legal to Use on Civilians (and Immigrants),” USA TODAY, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/11/27/tear-gas-forbidden-war-but-legal-use-civilians-and-migrants/2133144002/>.

Iraq.³⁵⁵ The author of the bill, Senator John Ensign, argued that tear gas is useful for house to house clearing operations and is a better replacement for bullets. Therefore, the AFP should consider the procurement of military-grade gas masks and tear gas canisters in preparation for future urban operations.

The JSOU troops also realized the weakness of their night-fighting capability. The troops were not equipped with flash suppressors which made them vulnerable to enemy observation. The United States armed forces, mainly the Marines and the Army, are interested in expanding the use of flash and sound suppressors for their troops.³⁵⁶ The U.S. Special Operations forces commonly use flash and sound suppressors. Furthermore, it was argued that troops could fight better if their weapons were silent and the muzzle flashes from their guns hidden. Therefore, the AFP should consider the procurement of flash suppressors for units that usually conduct night operations.

JTG-Vector experienced that quality armored vests withstood direct fire from the terrorists. Armored vests reduced the risk of the troops from being hit in their vital organs. The arrival of armored vests contributed to the reduction of casualties of the JTG-Vector forces. According to FM 3-06, the U.S. Army field manual for *Urban Operations*, commanders can increase the survivability of their troops by ensuring the availability of protective equipment such as helmets and body armor.³⁵⁷ Also, the troops must be trained and disciplined in using such protective gear. Therefore, the AFP should consider the continuous procurement of battle-tested and hard-plate reinforced armored vests used by the troops during the Marawi siege.

³⁵⁵ David Ruppe, "Senate Restates U.S. Policy on Using Tear Gas in Combat | Analysis | NTI," accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.nti.org/gsn/article/senate-restates-us-policy-on-using-tear-gas-in-combat/>.

³⁵⁶ Todd South, "The New Stealth Infantry: How Suppressors Will Change Battlefield Tactics," *Military Times*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2017/06/27/the-new-stealth-infantry-how-suppressors-will-change-battlefield-tactics/>.

³⁵⁷ Department of the Army, "Urban Operations," 4–11.

C. TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES

The operations of JTG-Vector revealed the need for its forces to improve its intelligence capabilities. The capability of the units under JTG-Vector contributed both to the success and failure of their operations. Their ability to exploit the radios that they captured and their optimization of the uses of drones improved their information gathering on the terrorists. According to *Urban Operations*, the urban environment impacts reconnaissance capability, and the increased importance of credible human intelligence (HUMINT) and the IPB process is more complicated.³⁵⁸ The buildings in urban areas provide perfect hiding places for the enemy. HUMINT can provide most of the necessary information for urban operations. Therefore, in the conduct of future urban operations, the JTG-Vector should develop a procedure for handling captured communication equipment of the enemy, especially captured radios, and they should integrate the utilization of quadcopter drones to the urban operations of tactical units. The AFP should also adapt this lesson for the improvement of its capability to conduct urban warfare in the future.

The JTG-Vector forces learned from its failure to plan for contingencies at the beginning of the Marawi siege. Combat operations in urban areas should be planned thoroughly. The planning of the operations of JTG-Vector forces throughout the siege improved when there was enough time for them to conduct reconnaissance and plan for their operations. According to FM 3-06, to reduce risk in urban operations, the subordinates must be given ample time to plan and rehearse for the operations.³⁵⁹ The planning must be detailed, including thorough intelligence and preparation for possible consequences of the operations. Therefore, preparation for future urban operations should be given ample time. Also, training exercises should be conducted for urban operations with emphasis on contingencies that may happen during urban operations.

JTG-Vector forces have established that using codes for the buildings depicted in maps could be an excellent tool for identifying and coordinating troop location. All troops of JTF-Marawi adopted it, and it was easier to communicate the location of troops

³⁵⁸ Department of the Army, 4-1.

³⁵⁹ Department of the Army, 5-6.

compared to the military grid reference system and cardinal directions. According to FM 3-06, the U.S. Army recognizes the challenges posed by an urban environment in its information system, especially in communication.³⁶⁰ Also, communication problems at the tactical level leads to failure to maintain a common operational picture (COP). Therefore, the use of coded maps would help in preserving COP in urban warfare. Thus the AFP should consider adopting this system for identification of location in future urban operations.

The JTG-Vector imposed a rotation scheme for all the units under its command to mitigate the psychological effect of prolonged battle to the troops. The battalions and JSOUs under JTG-Vector implement the scheme differently, but the purpose is the same. According to FM 3-06, the U.S. Army is concerned with controlling combat stress as part of their force health protection (FHP).³⁶¹ The rotation scheme of JTG-Vector can be an excellent approach to manage combat stress of individual soldiers in a prolonged battle. Therefore, the AFP should consider adopting a rotation scheme if the AFP will be involved in protracted urban fighting in the future.

JTG Vector showed the effect of psychological operations using loudspeakers during the Marawi siege. Aside from psychological operations, the loudspeaker can be a tool for sending messages to the terrorists and hostages during urban operations. According to FM 3-06, the U.S. Army considers psychological operations as necessary in shaping urban operations.³⁶² It can be instrumental in manipulating the decisions and the will of their enemies to fight. Therefore, the AFP should integrate psychological operations using loudspeakers in the conduct of urban warfare in the future.

The cycle of operations of JTG-Vector forces revolved in planning and assessment, softening or saturation fire, assault, site exploitation, and occupation. This cycle is comparable to the framework of the U.S. Army in urban operations. The operational

³⁶⁰ Department of the Army, 4–15.

³⁶¹ Department of the Army, 10–16.

³⁶² Department of the Army, 9–10.

framework of the U.S. Army has five essential components: understand, shape, engage, consolidate, and transition.³⁶³ The AFP should adopt the cycle of operation developed during the Marawi siege to serve as a guide for the commanders in conducting future urban operations with the same nature as the Marawi siege.

D. CONCLUSION

As analyzed, the lessons learned of JTG-Vector are already recognized in the urban operations doctrine manual and practices of the U.S. armed forces. The adoption of the recommendations based on the lessons learned from the successes and failures of JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege would be the practical way to improve the capability of the AFP in future urban operations. The AFP cannot afford to match the weapons and equipment of the U.S. armed forces that were integrated into their TTP in conducting urban operations. The recommended materiel that should be purchased were already tested during the siege. The enhancement and additional procurement of this materiel will strengthen the capability of the AFP to defeat any threat of terrorism in urban terrain. The phases of the operations of JTG-Vector inside the MBA should serve as a guide for future urban operations. Furthermore, the AFP should recognize lessons learned about the vulnerabilities of troops and armored vehicles in close combat to minimize casualties. The AFP could respond better to any threat in its urban centers in the future should the recommendations of this thesis be adopted. The next chapter is the conclusion of this research.

³⁶³ Department of the Army, 6-1.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

The narrative of the successes and failures of JTG-Vector's experiences from the first day to the end of the Marawi siege can be useful for the preparations of the AFP for future urban operations. The battle against the ISIS-Philippines in Marawi City ended in five months.³⁶⁴ The government forces decisively defeated the terrorists who attacked Marawi City. From day one of the siege, JTG-Vector played roles that were essential in defeating the terrorists. Most of the lessons learned from the operations of JTG-Vector can be found in the doctrine, field manual, and practices of the U.S. Armed Forces. Therefore, the AFP should adopt the recommendations stated in this paper that address the question of how the armed forces of the Philippines can improve its urban warfare capabilities to face the existing threat of terrorists in urban areas.

A. PROCUREMENT RECOMMENDATION

This paper recommends the procurement of materiel that would help improve the capability of the AFP in urban warfare. The additional communication equipment is meant to fill the gaps in communications during emergencies wherein the AFP needs to conduct joint and combined operations. M2 .50 caliber machine guns, tear gas and gas masks, quadcopter drones, and armored vests were proven to be useful in the operations of JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege. The procurement of additional units of the said materiel would translate to more units of the AFP adequately equipped to fight in urban terrain. The improvement of protection features of armored vehicles will minimize their vulnerabilities in fighting in close areas in the future. The improved protection would enhance the capabilities of the armored vehicles to support the maneuver of troops, casualty evacuation, and resupply in urban terrain. JTG-Vector forces did not have flash suppressors that could hide the muzzle flash of their weapons in the dark. The procurement of the said weapon accessory will significantly improve the ability of the individual to be stealth and fight at

³⁶⁴ "Philippines Declares End of 5-Month Battle with IS in Marawi City," Nikkei Asian Review, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippine-declares-end-of-IS-battle-in-Marawi>.

night. This additional materiel will substantially enhance the fighting capability of AFP in urban warfare.

This recommended equipment are practical and can be acquired easily by the AFP; they are available in the inventory of Philippine allies, particularly the United States. The United States has always helped in the improvement of the AFP through foreign military sales and military aid, especially for fighting terrorism. The recommended materiel are not big-ticket items, and the Philippine government would be able to finance the procurement of such materiel. The said materiel is practical because can be easily integrated into the TTP of the AFP in urban warfare since the said weapons and equipment are an augmentation to what the AFP already possesses.

B. TTP RECOMMENDATION

The improvement of the capabilities of the AFP in urban warfare should also deal with how the AFP should fight its adversaries in urban combat in the future. The AFP should develop a doctrine in urban operations based on the lessons learned from the operations of JTG-Vector during the Marawi siege and based on the weapons and equipment available in the inventory of AFP. The cycle of operation observed in this thesis should be an excellent basis to guide the AFP troops in future urban operations.

C. FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION

This research covers only the operations of the JTG-Vector forces that focused mainly on the operations of its two JSOUs and two battalions. Further research should be conducted on the level of JTF-Trident and JTF Marawi to learn how they handled the aspects of urban warfare like media relations and the logistical requirement of the troops on the ground in addition to fighting the terrorists and rescuing hostages.

Another research recommendation is the comparative study of the three joint task groups, namely JTG-Vector, JTG-Tiger, and JTG-Musang. Perhaps, studying the two other joint task groups could reveal other lessons.

This research only recommends the procurement of additional units of weapons and equipment. Weapons and equipment currently in the inventory of the AFP that I think are

practical and effective should also be enhanced. Further research for more sophisticated and highly effective weapons and equipment for urban operations should be conducted to enhance the knowledge of the AFP on the materiel available in the market.

Lastly, further research should be conducted on the development of military-grade quadcopter drones that are silent, sturdy, and could survive and recover in urban areas after colliding with buildings and other obstacles.

Considering the nature of the battle in urban terrain and the terrorist group that attacked the city, achieving victory was difficult. The Marawi siege is the most significant urban battle experienced by Filipino soldiers in recent history. The terrorists fought hard and fiercely. The terrorists knew the terrain in Marawi City far better than the government forces did.

The government forces liberated Marawi City from the terrorists after a five-month-long battle; however, the success cannot be attributed to a single action or a single unit alone. The decisiveness of the president to declare martial law in the area provided the AFP freedom of action to resolve the crisis. The support of civilians and AFP leadership contributed to keeping the high spirits of the troops while fighting at the front. While the brainstorming during planning sessions of JTG-Vector resulted in some innovations in fighting the terrorists, above all, the courage and determination of troops in facing the threat of terrorist snipers and IEDs contributed to the liberation of Marawi City. Through the ingenuity and determination of the AFP as a whole, victory was achieved.

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