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The Siege at Hue

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than on the way soldiers are organized before and during combat.” In other words, *post-facto* law enforcement is only one tool, and not a powerful one at that, in the struggle to prevent atrocities and war crimes.

It is this breadth of treatment that lifts Osiel’s discussion far above stereotypical legal analysis and makes it a truly significant contribution to the literature of military professionalism and military ethics. *Obeying Orders* connects the moral argument deeply to the professional commitments of soldiering. Members of the military profession should be encouraged to exercise their ethical judgment over as wide a scope as possible within the functional requirements of military effectiveness and efficiency.

It would be a shame and a mistake if only military and civilian lawyers chose to read this profound meditation on the moral foundations of soldiering itself. Informed by military practicality, and respectful of the possibilities of deepening and widening the highest senses of military professionalism, *Obeying Orders* is the first book on professional ethics that a seasoned officer ought to read.

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Smith, George W. *The Siege at Hue*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1999. 195pp. \$49.95

George W. Smith has provided an excellent historical summary of the battle of Hue, based on his personal experience as an information officer assigned to the 1st Division of the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam (ARVN), and on after-action reports, articles, and

interviews. The book highlights the complexities and dynamics of conducting military operations in urban terrain, particularly in a combat environment.

Hue had been the imperial capital of Vietnam, and it was the country’s cultural and intellectual center. It was South Vietnam’s third-largest city, strategically located in the country’s narrowest part, near the coast. One of the few cities where until 1968 there had been no U.S. combat presence, it was virtually undefended and consequently a lucrative target for the North Vietnamese army and the Viet Cong.

The battle of Hue was the largest single engagement of the Vietnam War. It lasted from 31 January to 25 February 1968 and (not counting civilian deaths) claimed 5,713 casualties on both sides. Smith describes the battle as a classic joint and combined operation. The city was divided into two areas of responsibility, with the South Vietnamese army assigned the mission of retaking the northern portion and the U.S. Marines that of regaining control south of the Perfume River.

The urban conditions in Hue were comparable to those of Dodge City in the American “Old West.” Some buildings had wooden fronts, porches, and sidewalks; the streets were narrow, and buildings were densely concentrated. In the middle of Hue, however, was a virtually impregnable fortress known as the Citadel, with towers, ramparts, moats, concrete walls, and bunkers. The walls were twenty-six feet high and in some sections forty feet thick. The moat was ninety feet wide at many points and up to twelve feet deep. The Imperial Palace, another enclave within Hue, was surrounded by a twenty-foot wall.

Smith identifies three costly errors made by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong on the first day of their attack. First, they failed to overrun the 1st ARVN Division headquarters. Second, they failed to assault the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) compound. They had sufficient forces to accomplish both missions. Third, they failed to destroy the An Cuu Bridge, south of the city, leaving open a route by which the Marines could reinforce and resupply the MACV compound. The bridge was destroyed five days later by enemy sappers, but too late. These errors most likely prevented the enemy from holding Hue for longer than they did.

The value of this book lies in the lessons learned by the forces fighting in Hue. The first lesson was the value of accurate intelligence. At the operational level, the allies falsely believed that the massive buildup of enemy troops around Khe Sanh near the Demilitarized Zone meant that the enemy did not have enough manpower for a countrywide offensive. At the tactical level, commanders routinely made decisions in the absence of any specific intelligence about enemy strength or dispositions in Hue. The importance of intelligence is best illustrated by the events on the night of 16 February. The enemy suffered a tremendous setback when, on the basis of an intercepted radio message, allied artillery destroyed a battalion-sized force trying to infiltrate through a gate on the southwestern wall. The second lesson involved the use of air and artillery fire support. These supporting arms greatly facilitate fire and maneuver in any environment, especially in cities; however, authorization for their use in cities is normally restricted by rules of engagement in order to limit collateral damage, and Hue was no

exception. Unfortunately, the buildings were fortresses, with interlocking lines of fire from roofs, attics, and windows. The South Vietnamese government eventually lifted all restrictions on the use of heavy weapons south of the Perfume River. However, another limitation on heavy firepower is weather. Naval gunfire, eight-inch howitzer fire, and tactical aircraft support were frequently not readily available because of poor conditions.

The third lesson is the complexity of house-to-house fighting. Heavy weapons, such as tanks, 106 mm recoilless rifles, mortars, and 3.5-inch bazookas, were used in Hue for street fighting. Objectives could be reached only by going through buildings. The Marines dug holes in walls through which they rushed, clearing the rooms on the other side and establishing sniper positions in preparation to take the next buildings. Streets could be crossed only under a barrage of covering fire. Mortars provided local indirect fire support that could be used in lieu of larger weapons that were either unauthorized or unavailable. Mortars helped reduce the personnel-for-building casualty ratio. The enemy forces in Hue were well dug in, well supplied, and prepared in some cases to fight to the finish. None of the Marines had had any training in street fighting prior to Hue.

Today's efforts by the Joint Staff to develop urban-combat doctrine and by the Marine Corps and Army to produce tactics, techniques, and procedures are meant to ensure that the United States does not face the same dilemma in the future. Seventy-five percent of the world's population now resides in cities. This will equate to eight to ten billion people by the year 2025. The U.S. military used to fight *for* cities; now it is required to fight *in* them—cities similar to

Hue. George W. Smith offers a very good perspective on what such street fighting is all about.

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Shultz, Richard H., Jr. *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 408pp. \$27.50

At its core, this is a remarkably well told story of failure—heartbreaking failure to be sure, and failure despite the heroic efforts of some remarkable men to achieve success, but still failure. The U.S. covert war against Hanoi was, as this book makes clear, patently unsuccessful. That it could have been otherwise makes the story all the more compelling.

A leading expert on low-intensity conflict and covert warfare, Shultz has filled a gap that has troubled those who for decades have been trying to understand the Vietnam War. Using meticulously documented research, and writing in a reader-friendly style, Shultz lays out the history of the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group (usually referred to simply as “SOG”) from 1964 to 1972. Such a book is arguably long overdue, but classification of material and the lack of documented interviews with former SOG members crippled previous attempts. At worst, the operations of SOG have suffered gross distortions, turning one of the war’s most interesting features into farce and pulp fiction. Happily, this is no longer the case. Now, using newly declassified documents, Shultz lays to rest many of the myths—including the now-infamous

CNN claim that Operation TAILWIND involved killing U.S. deserters and the use of the nerve agent Sarin.

Shultz begins his tale by explaining how an aggressive Kennedy administration, angered and humiliated by the Bay of Pigs, formally placed CIA-controlled covert operations against North Vietnam under military leadership. President Kennedy, his brother Robert, and other key advisors wanted immediate results, and they ignored the fact that a covert operation takes time to achieve its desired effect. Nor was the military high command ecstatic about gaining this new responsibility. A generic aversion to special operations, fear of where Kennedy might be taking the Army, and distrust of many involved in Special Operations, resulted in a bureaucratic struggle of rare intensity and duration. One of the tragic ironies emerging from Shultz’s research is that from the beginning, senior U.S. military and political leaders effectively prevented SOG, which was charged with the new covert mission, from achieving its full potential.

Thus, the cards were stacked against SOG from the start. One obstacle was an administration that, following President Kennedy’s assassination, seemed hesitant to take advantage of apparent opportunities. Nor did SOG ever receive proper support from the military or CIA leadership. Opposition from senior members of the State Department was at times ferocious. In addition, SOG’s South Vietnamese counterpart was never fully trusted, possibly with good reason. As a result SOG rarely had the right mandate or qualified people, operated under byzantine restrictions, and never achieved a rapport with the one organization that could have dramatically increased its effectiveness. Shultz also