



# A History of Modern Urban Operations

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*Edited by*

GREGORY FREMONT-BARNES

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# INTRODUCTION

Various observers predict that urban warfare is on the increase, with recent events in Iraq, Libya and Syria indicating that the battleground is shifting inexorably to conurbations, large and small, so betraying the need for a closer study of urban operations. This trend towards the growing frequency of fighting in cities stems from the increasing urbanisation of societies and the essential need for the weaker side to benefit from the force-multiplying effects conferred on it by the defensive nature of this type of warfare, which ranks amongst the most arduous, time-consuming and sanguinary of all the various permutations of military operations conducted by combatants past, present and, almost without question, future.

In the context of an insurgency, one can scarcely wonder why conventional combatant forces seek to avoid fighting in built-up areas whenever possible; where a weaker force cannot operate in open terrain lest it be destroyed by superior firepower and manoeuvrability it often chooses to compensate by seeking the cover of a three-dimensional, highly complex urban environment. The inability of conventional forces to manoeuvre troops and vehicles with ease, and constraints imposed on the need to limit collateral damage owing to the presence of unarmed civilians, friendly or unfriendly, both hamper operations in an urban environment, a process further complicated by the scrutiny of the press. Built-up areas also present greater challenges for supply, communications and command, and other points to be examined throughout this study. The urban battlefield favours the weak, both numerically and technologically;

thus, whether within the context of an insurgency or a conventional setting, relying on urban sprawl seems a sensible option for those for whom fighting in the open exposes their weaknesses, when villages, towns and cities offer the possibility of prolonging the fight and sapping the will of the enemy to carry on the struggle. At the very least, one may partly negate the enemy's ability to deploy sophisticated weapons which far outmatch one's own capabilities. As casualties mount and the conflict becomes drawn-out, the negative political implications grow in proportion for the attacker—at least for those for whom numbers and public opinion matter.

Fighting in urban areas is hardly new and need not necessarily involve substantial, much less capital, cities. Indeed, these seldom constitute what Clausewitz termed the enemy's 'centre of gravity'. Various cases underline this point. The French occupation of Madrid in 1808 did not bring peace; in fact the war in Iberia carried on for years; and the capture of Moscow in 1812 (albeit not the Russian capital at the time but certainly the Empire's principal city) did not force Tsar Alexander into negotiations with Napoleon, much less bring the campaign to an end. Two years later, the fall of Washington to a British expeditionary force failed to bring the United States to heel. Nor when American forces captured Mexico City in 1846 did their apparent success terminate the war. Half a century later, when in 1900 Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein and Pretoria, the capitals of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, respectively, the Boers merely abandoned their conventional tactics and exchanged them for an 18-month-long guerrilla campaign. The fall of Beijing to the Japanese in 1937 similarly failed to signal their conquest of China, just as the American occupation of Baghdad in 2003 formed but a brief conventional phase of an insurgency which occupied US forces for the next eight years.

Having said this, cities—whether the seat of government or not—continue to represent important military, economic and political objectives, and while their capture do not always alone hold the key to operational success, possession of built-up areas increasingly accrue to the advantage of those controlling them, whether in a conventional or asymmetric environment, not least owing to the presence of important infrastructure—a sizeable population, the concentration of food and supplies, the seat of national or regional government, sources of energy, communications centres, airfields and important road junctions and networks.

No study of modern urban operations can claim a comprehensive approach to a subject for which so many intriguing and varied examples offer themselves for study. A range of case studies receive treatment here, exemplifying the key elements of urban warfare, but many more examples deserve careful scrutiny, of which some of the principal examples include: Madrid (1936), Ortona (1943), Caen and Warsaw (1944), Athens (1944–1945), Manila and Budapest (1945), Seoul (1950 and again in 1951), Aden and Jerusalem (1967), Saigon (1975), Beirut (intermittently from 1975–1989), Kuwait City (1991), Kabul (intermittently from 1992–1996), Mogadishu (1993), Grozny (1994–1995 and 1999–2000), Baghdad and Basra (2003) and, in more recent years, numerous towns and cities across Libya, Iraq and Syria.

The case studies which appear in this study encapsulate the tactical lessons which consistently emerge from a close examination of urban operations—however wide its scope—such as the need for effective intelligence on the enemy—numbers, weapons, morale, intentions, and dispositions—and the advantages accruing to those deploying a full complement of mutually supporting weapons, including infantry, armour, helicopters, and artillery. Snipers positioned in key locations are also essential, as is the need to confine the enemy to the boundaries of the city, so preventing reinforcement, resupply, evacuation and/or retreat. Restricting his freedom of movement both within and outside a city is also usually vital to success. To achieve this, considerable fighting often occurs outside urban confines, sometimes conducted on a greater scale than the urban operations which may follow.

This book seeks to familiarise readers with the various elements shared by all urban operations: to examine instances of urban fighting within an insurgency, in the context of traditional conventional operations, and as hybrid operations embracing elements of both symmetric and asymmetric warfare. Each chapter focuses on a particular case study; collectively, they reveal the complexities of the three-dimensional battlespace, including how it has evolved and what lessons may be derived from each example. Each case study approaches its subject in a style unique to itself, reflecting the considerable variation of circumstances which distinguish one urban operation from the next—even while they all share some common elements. Accordingly, each chapter seeks to highlight those features deemed most significant in shaping the conduct and outcome of a particular operation, including—where space and relevant importance permits—details of the rival forces such as organisation, structure

and/or strength, and an analysis of the key tactical problems facing both sides, such as the nature of the ground, logistics, training for and/or experience of an urban environment, the exploitation of intelligence, the role of communications, the various weapons employed, the state of the respective combatants' morale, the function and efficacy of leadership, the role of and attitude toward civilians, and the number of casualties inflicted and sustained. Discussion of the factors to which success or failure may be ascribed and an assessment of the outcome—such as whether or not the operation constituted a tactical victory but a strategic defeat—are considered where applicable, in addition to whether or not a particular urban operation achieved the objective sought. In all cases, lessons emerge, which in some instances found application later in the course of the same conflict and which offer useful guidance for the conduct of urban operations today.

Gregory Fremont-Barnes

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## Nineteenth-Century Precedents

*Gregory Fremont-Barnes*

The nineteenth century offers many fewer examples of urban fighting than for the century which followed; armies required space to manoeuvre in the field and the considerably less destructive firepower of the era generally ill-suited belligerents unless they opted to fight on unconventional terms. By the time of the First World War, the fronts either included few built-up areas or the concentration of heavy artillery simply obliterated them, leaving nothing left standing to dignify as a town or city. As it happened, once the trench lines of the Western Front became more or less established—and, indeed, effectively static for nearly four years from the autumn of 1914—urban operations seldom figured, at least not on a substantial scale. The much more fluid, mobile and fast-paced nature of the Second World War certainly altered this to some extent; much of the fighting in Europe and North Africa took place across open ground where rapidly moving infantry, armour and artillery, with or without air support, could largely avoid the frustration and heavy casualties attendant upon combat in built-up areas. Still, urban warfare played a significant part, particularly in Italy and the on Eastern front, contrasting sharply with operations in North Africa and on the contested islands of the Pacific.

Coverage of nineteenth-century urban operations could conceivably cover a number of actions drawn from the Napoleonic Wars, such

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as those fought at Austerlitz (1805), Buenos Aires (1806 and 1807), Montevideo (1807), Corunna and Aspern-Essling (1809), and at Lützen, Dresden and Leipzig (1813)—to name some of the most prominent examples. One might also examine the street-fighting which exemplified the revolution of 1830 in Paris, and the independence movements of the same year in Belgium and Poland which sparked clashes in the streets of Brussels and Warsaw, respectively. The revolutions of 1848 witnessed further urban clashes across Europe, most notably in Paris, Berlin, Milan, Vienna, and Prague, which became the focus of bitter clashes between civilians and soldiers. Entirely conventional forces opposed one another at the battles of Monterrey (1846) during the US-Mexican War and at Fredericksburg (1862) during the American Civil War, while the sieges of Delhi and Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny (1857–1858) provide further insight into the nature of urban combat, as would an examination of the bloody contest played out on the streets of Paris between government troops and the Communards in 1871.

This chapter will focus on three Napoleonic battles, which in their own ways exemplify most of the key features present in the examples cited above: Saragossa, which involved a largely civilian population pitted against a conventional military force; Fuentes de Oñoro, which centred around a small village serving as the attacker's primary objective; and Plancenoit, a village occupying only a small—but vitally important—sector of a much larger, open battlefield, that of Waterloo.

### SARAGOSSA, 27 JANUARY–20 FEBRUARY 1809

Following Napoleon's occupation of Spain in May 1808, the Emperor's brother, Joseph, assumed the throne after the arrest and forcible exile of the rightful sovereign, and a major rising took place in Madrid among the population, causing resistance to spread rapidly across the country. The regular Spanish armies suffered repeated and disastrous defeats at the hands of the French—many of them veterans of the great campaigns of 1805–1807 against the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians—enabling the invaders to appear in June before the great city of Saragossa, to which they laid siege. As preparations for defence were incomplete, General Jean-Antoine Verdier attempted to carry the city by assault, only to find his troops repulsed at every turn by armed civilians crowding windows and doors, showering the attackers with musket fire and stubbornly disputing possession of every structure. Verdier altered tack, surrounding

the city and undertaking a proper siege, until the disastrous capitulation of General Pierre Dupont's army at Bailen in July 1808 obliged the French to withdraw all forces behind the river Ebro.

Undaunted by this setback, Napoleon rapidly recovered his position by placing himself at the head of a new army and crossing the Pyrenees. By the end of the year, he had defeated Spanish forces and retaken Madrid, in the process driving to the north-west coast of Spain for ignominious evacuation by the Royal Navy the British expeditionary force which had landed in Portugal the previous August. These propitious circumstances enabled the French to renew offensive operations across the Peninsula, badly defeating the Spanish at Tudela, whence many fugitives took refuge in Saragossa, to which the victorious French laid siege for a second time, with the investment and bombardment commencing in January 1809. The population had spent weeks preparing the city's defences and, in the words of Count Marbot, who took part in operations:

The peasants were the most determined; they had entered the town with their wives, their children, and even their herds. Each party of them had a quarter of the town, or a house, assigned to it for its dwelling place, which they were sworn to defend...Religious fanaticism and the sacred love of country exalted their courage, and they blindly resigned themselves to the will of God...The besieged only agreed on one point: to defend themselves to the death.<sup>1</sup>

The stage was set for the greatest urban battle of the Napoleonic era.

Marshal Jean Lannes ordered an attack on the breaches on 27 January, after most of the Spaniards' batteries had been silenced, though the defenders continued to employ their small arms to harass the French sappers and gunners. General Louis-François Lejeune, the chief engineer, noted how:

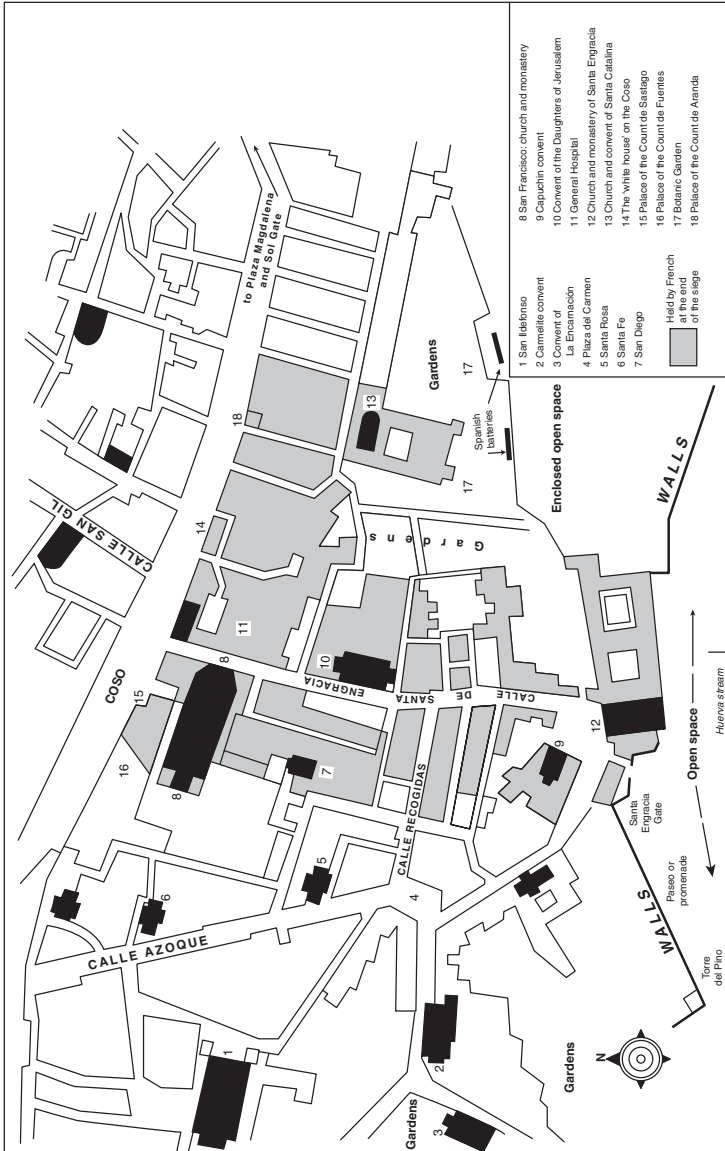
Such was the intrepidity of the Spaniards that at the very moment when a cannon ball made its hole in the wall of a house, those who were inside it at once used this hole as a loophole through which to fire their muskets, even though it often happened that a second cannon ball would send the wall crashing down on its defenders. Everywhere, they could be seen building barricades in the midst of the debris.<sup>2</sup>

French siege guns eventually established three breaches large enough to facilitate an assault between the Santa Monica convent on the French

right and the monastery of Santa Engracia on the left, under the latter of which sappers had also placed mines. In the afternoon, three companies of infantry stood poised, ready for the assault; once these had penetrated the walls and secured the breaches, the plan called for whole regiments, waiting in the trenches, to follow in their wake, together with light artillery which would be manhandled into the city to support the infantry. Once the mist cleared by midday, engineers detonated the mines under Santa Engracia and the columns quickly advanced, their approach heralded by the peel of the city's church bells and the sound of gunfire from defenders on the walls and houses overlooking the breach (Maps 1.1 and 1.2).

French troops entered the convent's two gardens, where they came under intense musketry from the terraces surrounding them and a cannon firing grapeshot from only twenty-five yards away. From the upper terrace, two further cannon swept the gardens with their fire, accompanied by 800 defenders—regular infantry, citizens of all ages and both sexes wielding muskets, pistols and blunderbusses—firing from windows and embrasures cut into the convent's walls. After a bitter struggle, the French managed to seize the whole of the convent of Santa Engracia; the mines demolished half the exterior walls of the monastery, and a detachment of Polish infantry, spearheaded by sappers and followed by the remainder of the regiment, bolted across 200 yards of unobstructed ground only to discover a second wall with a breach just large enough to accommodate access to a handful of soldiers simultaneously. Notwithstanding the dreadful fire, the Poles forced their way into the main building, engaging in fierce hand-to-hand fighting before emerging into a small square, the Plaza de Santa Engracia, seizing the houses around it and exchanging fire with Spaniards lining the walls between the convent and the Pino Tower. Soon the attackers came upon the Carmen gate and charged into the Trinitarian monastery, bayoneting the gunners defending it and forcing out its defenders. Elsewhere, in the centre breach created in the walls facing the San José monastery, French light infantry stormed the breach and discovered themselves in the city's main oil press; from there they emerged to capture several houses but found themselves blocked from further progress by a group of small abodes fashioned into a triangular block of miniature fortresses.

The French failed in their attack on Santa Monica, but partial success at the other two breaches secured for them control of two large wedges protruding into the city. In the meantime, the French found every house, convent, monastery and public building had been fortified;



**Map 1.1** Saragossa, January–February 1809: Santa Engracia sector (*Source* Rudorff, Raymond. *War to the Death: The Sieges of Saragossa, 1808–1809*. New York: Macmillan, 1974, p. 218)



absolutely no prospect existed, at least at this initial phase, of compelling the inhabitants to surrender. The precepts of siege warfare—certainly those observed throughout the eighteenth century—laid down that once a practicable breach had been made in a city's walls the commander of the garrison could surrender with honour on the basis that he could not expect to hold the city against a numerically superior enemy. Capitulation agreed under such circumstances theoretically protected the townspeople from looting, rape, and perhaps even wholesale massacre.

The Saragossans, however, aware of widespread French depredations already widely committed across Spain—not least the obscene violation of places of worship—stood utterly determined to defend the city to the death. Inhabitants of all walks of life, together with soldiers, barricaded every house and loopholed as many as possible; whole districts snaked with labyrinths of tunnels, many linked to houses, trenches, ditches, and barricades, all held by fanatical defenders—soldiers, peasants, clergymen and city-dwellers—prepared to hold them at all costs with whatever weapons came to hand: firearms, knives, hatchets, farm implements, clubs, and even bits of masonry, bricks, and rubble strewn everywhere by the assiduous work of French siege guns. Women and children loaded muskets, carried ammunition, and aided the wounded, while priests and monks frequently carried heavy crucifixes, as much as weapons as for encouraging the faithful in their struggle against those who would profane a deeply religious society which condemned the invaders as the worst of infidels: apostates of an atheistic revolution.

Meanwhile, French and Polish infantry continued to funnel into Santa Engracia, engaging the defenders from room to room, through cloisters, along corridors and up staircases—all ferociously held. Makeshift barricades of wool sacks and even piles of books removed from the shelves of the monastic library offered only temporary cover but played their part in barring—or at least slowing—French progress. Elsewhere, fighting a bloody path across a ditch and forcing their way through windows and the artillery embrasures cut into the walls, the French burst into the Trinitarian monastery where combatants neither offered nor received quarter—a ubiquitous feature of the fighting. Those defending the churches and chapels put up the most determined resistance, with altars, shrines, and statues witnesses to savage fighting, in the course of which a ricocheting round shot wounded Lejeune.

By the conclusion of the first day's fighting, the French had lost over 600 men, with very little progress to show for such considerable losses;

little could they have imagined that three more weeks of this carnage were to follow. Hostile inhabitants still occupied the houses extending from the Plaza de Santa Engracia and the French held only a handful of houses in the prominent thoroughfare known as the Calle Pabostre. The defenders had moreover blocked all the approaches to a major thoroughfare known as the Coso and the convent of Santa Monica remained heavily defended despite an open breach. All the while, fires caused by French shelling burned throughout the city, creating a hellish scene of devastation punctuated by the cries of Spanish wounded, whose comrades carried to the area around the cathedral for rudimentary medical attention. Yet despite the casualties—compounded by an epidemic created as a result of the French blockade—Spanish morale stood remarkably high.

Lannes, an experienced corps commander, well understood that he could not sustain casualties at the current rate if fighting of such a ferocious nature was to continue for any length of time. In planning to seize his principal objective, the Coso, his forces would first have to reach the boulevard, before which stood several substantial and heavily defended buildings well suited as bases for further penetration into the city. The French would also have to capture the hospital and the San Francisco monastery, the fall of the latter of which would consolidate their hold over the central section of the Coso. In the city centre, Lannes' troops would also be required to seize the entire Calle Pabostre to enable them to advance up the Calle Quemada to the Coso. Other important objectives awaited French assault; on the right, two great obstacles barred their way: the heavily damaged but still defensible Santa Monica convent and the formidable San Agustin monastery adjoining it—both stout structures packed with hundreds of armed Spaniards and supported by artillery. By seizing these substantial structures, the French could advance down two principal streets, the Calle Palomar, and the Calle de San Agustin, which led to the end of the Coso and the Sol gate. In turn, the fall of the area around the Sol gate and the district in which it stood would enable French artillery to bombard the city centre at close range as well as to support an assault on its eastern extremity.

On the second day of fighting, 28 January, heavy artillery continued to batter the city, causing fires and explosions where shot found their way into ammunition dumps. Amidst the bombardment civilians continued to succumb to illness, with thousands, many of them sick and wounded, seeking refuge in sacred buildings for both shelter and divine protection. Batteries continued to pound the walls of Santa

Monica and San Agustín, while French troops remained fixed in the Plaza de Santa Engracia, unable to make progress along the surrounding streets owing to the ferocious stand made by priests, peasants, soldiers, and townspeople more than willing to sacrifice their lives for ground. For all their exertions, the French captured a few houses in the Calle Pabostre, but initially they could only occupy the ground and first floors, for in response the Spanish immediately scurried across rooflines and ensconced themselves in attics before launching themselves down staircases in surprise rushes. Spaniards in possession of the upper floors of buildings with French soldiers below might also drop grenades through holes made in the ceilings. These novel tactics in turn obliged the French to clear and hold every floor, especially the attics. Concurrently, continuous sniping occurred between the contending sides, and at 1400 hours a determined Spanish attack against the Trinitarian monastery nearly succeeded in recapturing that stronghold. In response, the French created embrasures in the walls for cannon and blocked windows and doors with whatever came to hand before reinforcing them with sandbags.

Elsewhere in the city, French and Polish troops found themselves unable to advance towards the Coso; indeed, despite strenuous effort and heavy losses they could make almost no headway in any sector, even across narrow streets, subject as they instantly became while in the attempt to ferocious fire from rooftops, windows, and loopholes whenever a soldier dared to expose himself. Exchanging fire with each other at short range—sometimes mere yards across a contested street—became a daily feature of the fighting. In order to reduce the Santa Monica, the French brought up additional mortars and conducted reconnaissance at night to examine the breaches, the defenders however invariably driving them back. Lannes launched a renewed assault against the houses on both sides of the Calle de Santa Engracia and on 30 January several more houses in the Calle Pabostre fell, but, as before, snipers picked off any soldier foolhardy enough to show himself at a window or open door. Once a breach had been made in the upper wall of the Santa Monica, a detachment of Polish infantry and sappers stormed it, only to encounter a second line of defences in the form of earth-filled wooden containers and guns mounted in embrasures in both cloisters. Amidst a hail of musket fire, grenades, and stones, the Poles managed to penetrate the building but established only a tenuous foothold. Elsewhere, French troops captured several houses in the Calle de Santa Engracia but could make no further progress, while despite mounting losses, the defenders

never flagged in their determination, encouraged, cajoled, and bullied by priests, nuns, monks, and civic leaders.

The French renewed their attack on the Santa Monica that night, charging the breach established in the wall of the upper garden, only to be repulsed by intense musketry and grapeshot unleashed by several hundred enraged Spaniards, whose compatriots in nearby streets fought with equal tenacity as the French sought to seize the building from the rear. Examples of fanatical resistance are legion; in the Calle de Santa Engracia, the French captured the cellar and ground floor of a house, but the defenders frustrated further progress by destroying the staircase and fortifying the upper floors. The French in turn adapted to circumstances and innovated: engineers, for instance, cut loopholes in the walls to facilitate small arms fire into the rooms of adjoining houses, though the defenders often blocked them up as quickly as the sappers formed them.

Lannes soon reached the conclusion that he could only make progress by employing gunpowder in large quantities and reducing the number of assaults across open areas as much as possible. Accordingly, orders went down the ranks expressly forbidding troops from fighting in exposed streets whenever possible; instead, he instructed sappers to tunnel under the streets and blow up whole blocks of houses—including their occupants—in massive explosions.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of these detonations, small detachments of troops would spring forward, occupy the smoking ruins, and there prepare for the next attack, executed in the same manner until, if necessary, the engineers systematically flattened the entire city, thereby either cowing the population into submission or burying it beneath the rubble. Operations commenced under General Lacoste, the chief engineer, who directed that when both sides of a street fell under French control sappers build a covered trench or double row of parapets constructed of sandbags to facilitate communication and to protect troops from small arms and artillery fire. If two adjoining houses fell largely intact, communication was to be facilitated by creating passages through connecting walls, funnelling troops through, assailing any hostile occupants, and finally fortifying the new conquest against counterattack by piling sandbags across doors and blocking up windows.

On 30 January, Lannes' subordinates implemented the new strategy. Engineers laid half a dozen barrels of gunpowder in the cellar of a house off the Calle de Santa de Engracia where a handful of determined Spaniards still held the upper floors with the French disconcertingly beneath them. After the soldiers' withdrawal a massive explosion caused the house to

collapse, together with several adjoining residences, but while the French sought to occupy the shattered remains Spaniards ensconced in nearby houses poured down a deadly fire, obliging the attackers to retreat. Meanwhile, furious fighting raged elsewhere, but while gunpowder certainly proved effective in reducing structures to battered, smoking ruins and killing all those within, to their aggravation the French repeatedly faced musket fire through newly created embrasures along the walls of any adjoining houses still largely intact. As before, the Spanish issued point-blank small arms fire, and cast grenades through windows, openings created in the ceilings, or down chimneys into kitchens or bedrooms. Some defenders even engaged in counter-mining, often forcing French engineers to abandon the operation and adopt the alternative of placing explosives against exposed walls in a painstaking yet effective exercise in demolition and occupation.

Limited space dictates that the whole, complex course of the fighting cannot be examined here; but it is sufficient to observe that over successive weeks the struggle carried on in this same vein: above ground, intense French artillery bombardment against convents and other heavily fortified buildings; breaches created and stormed at the point of the bayonet; a life-and-death hand-to-hand struggle; below ground, laborious mining and counter-mining; furious exchanges of musket and pistol fire; and countless terrifying, small-scale engagements with bayonet, knife, sword, cudgel, stones, or anything that happened to come to hand, with all the savagery that the close quarter fighting of such a febrile atmosphere engendered. Throughout, peasants, monks, priests, soldiers, women and even children all played their part in resisting French progress, especially in places of worship, in which Saragossa abounded. Yet despite ubiquitous, heroic resistance, even the most fiercely defended strongpoints gradually fell to the more disciplined, better trained and armed French and Poles, with no quarter given or received.

In due course, a massive charge laid against the wall of San Agustin created a breach large enough for grenadiers to storm it, followed by the main attacking column. The struggle inside the church became an epic of the siege, with hand-to-hand fighting commencing in the sacristy, shifting to the church itself, where its stalwart defenders fought as far as the main altar before more Spaniards arrived to reinforce their beleaguered compatriots. Fighting raged across improvised barricades composed of chairs and benches, as well as in the nave, aisles, side chapels, organ loft, and even the pulpit. Grenades found useful employment

throughout this bloody work, in which the defenders contested even the winding stairs leading to the bell tower. When the French emerged into the rest of the monastery, they found every corridor blocked with wool sacks and timber, even as more Spaniards, eager to defend a place of such holy significance, entered the complex to join the frenzied *mêlée*. Ultimately, the convent and monastery fell, enabling Lannes' troops to advance along some of the streets which extended out from the Santa Monica.

Fighting raged concurrently elsewhere in the city, with every structure contested in a bid to drive the Spaniards out in the most efficient manner, by moving progressively from house to house—many of which changed hands several times in the course of a single day's fighting—via holes created in adjoining ground floor walls. At the same time, where combat occurred in the streets, field guns swept away whole files of infantry and cleared paths blocked by citizens' barricades. As siege artillery continued to batter the city's most formidable structures, the dauntless Spaniards responded by fortifying themselves in the ruins and blocking the breaches blown through extant walls, wherever possible maintaining large garrisons even in heavily damaged buildings. As the siege continued, engineers employed larger quantities of black powder, with charges sometimes exceeding 200 lbs of black powder.

However heroic—and so often, as described, fanatic—the determination of the Saragossans and their fellow Aragonese to stem the Napoleonic tide, they simply could not hope to prevail against superior tactics and technology, even after the death of no less than the intrepid Lacoste himself, shot by a sniper on 31 January.<sup>4</sup> By early February, the spread of disease was compounding the cost to the inhabitants by claiming several hundred lives a day, with the rate of infection increasing rapidly. Stemming disease involved clearing away the dead—the fatal victims of bayonet, musket butt, knife, shot, shell or blast wounds—but many corpses lay unrecovered, decomposing amidst the rubble and detritus or simply left to fester in streets over which no side could clearly claim control. Under such conditions, scurvy ran rampant and gangrene afflicted many of the Spanish wounded, who more often than not succumbed to these and other forms of infection or disease owing to an acute shortage of doctors and woefully inadequate provision of medical supplies.

With progress painfully slow, the French cleared a path through the rubble at various points around the city, so enabling them to haul field