

Guerilla Warfare

An Introduction

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Contents

Before we start:	3
Introduction: Why Take Up Armed Struggle?	3
Getting Started	4
Build your base of support	4
Essential equipment	5
The Anarchist Guerrilla Group	6
Insurrection!	7
Defensive positions	8
Taking Action	9
Urban Warfare	10
Some final thoughts about Insurrection	11

The following information is intended as a history and study of past guerrilla groups ONLY!

Before we start:

There are a number of fairly good books on guerilla warfare, some of which are published by the U.S. Army, Marines and Navy. “Field guides” for counter-insurgency divisions of the Marines, the Rangers 101 Airborne and especially the Navy Seals are particularly worth reading, as they deal with scrounging for food and first aid, as well as survival in combat situations.

Another good book is “**Guerilla Warfare**” by Che Guevarra, which provides a good introduction to underground techniques, without going into the particulars of actual combat. Much of the following information is contained in Che’s book.

If you’re really interested in combat strategy, you should look into historical accounts of actual combat. I have to recommend any book that deals with the **Seminoles** of Florida and the **Apaches** of the U.S. Southwest, as they were definitely masters of camouflage, surprise, and hit-and-run fighting. The **Shawnee** also developed effective guerrilla fighting techniques, and it’s worth noting that the **Lakota** defeated the US military in several battles, and even won a war against the US.

Also, the **FMLN** had a long, partially successful insurgency against the government of El Salvador, which I also rely heavily on for this text. Another source is a pamphlet I once read on “**An Alternative to NATO: Towards a People’s Militia.**”

And, of course, there are dozens of books about the victorious struggle of the Vietnamese against Japanese, French and American invasions. Though some of these efforts were flawed due to conformity to rigid ideology, their experiences can illustrate how to successfully engage an opponent, and mistakes to be avoided. If you’ve read anything about Anarchist revolutions, you will have read some of what follows before. I’m not going to spend a lot of time and effort on this, as it is intended as a *starting point* for anyone serious in the study of Revolution.

Revolt, damn it!

Introduction: Why Take Up Armed Struggle?

The question of whether or not to take up arms and fight for liberation is a difficult one to answer. There has yet to be a successful armed Anarchist revolution (though the Kurds have established liberated, autonomous zones in what was once northern Syria.) To be fair, though, no substantial change in recent world history has been affected through non-violent means, either. Here in the 21st century, we live in a world of violent domination, where people are either compliant with corporate rule or done away with. As first-world consumers, we are all guilty of directly causing the subjugation of marginalized people the world over, the destruction of the global ecosphere and the deaths of those in political opposition to any government ours has relations with. I don’t mention this in order to cause guilt or make accusations, but mostly to point out to Americans who claim to be believers in non-violence that they are fooling themselves. As I write and you read this, people in Central America are picking our fruit and coffee for us at wages that *just* keep them from starving to death quickly, even with the whole family working; in Indonesia, mountains are being strip-mined for ores that will go to make our cars, computers, and bikes – literally over the dead bodies of the people who once lived there...I could go on and

on along these lines, but the point is – unless you grow your own food on land that a Native American family has invited you to share with them and likewise grow the fabrics that provide your clothing – you are a benefactor of the most atrocious, blood-thirsty, ruthless nation-state the world has ever seen. But, I digress...

The legitimacy of armed uprising is always debatable, and it is my opinion that this is an issue that everyone has to decide individually. Therefore, I won't spend much time debating it, as I consider pacifism to be a sort of self-therapy to dismiss anything the pacifist doesn't wish to confront on a personal level. There are plenty of articles, essays and books to counter my viewpoint, and please feel free to read and learn from them, as I have. But please do not try to argue the pacifist point of view with me, and **don't censure me**. Let the government do its own dirty work. Now, on with the educational portion of this program...

Getting Started

Build your base of support

There are several things that have to be done before taking up armed struggle. The first of which is to surround yourself with people you know well enough to trust with your life. The second is to prepare to leave everyone else you know behind, and prepare for a lonely, painful existence of hardship and uncertainty. And drug, drink, and sexual abstinence as well. There are no days off.

(i want to interject at this time that Che makes a very valid point here, but i have a different perspective on this. again - based on native american societies, who traveled with their families. still, if your camp is unexpectedly over-run and your group is too fucked-up to put up a decent fight, flight is the only option for survival. how will you deal with someone incapacitated? leave them to fend for themselves, or shoot them in the head to prevent them from being captured, tortured, and murdered by the enemy? there are other options – including regrouping and launching a counter-attack to retake your camp and rescue your comrades.)

So, now you and a small band of friends are ready to begin. Before you pull off your first actions, there are a lot of preparations you will have to make.

First, make sure you know as much as you can possibly find out about your base of operations: Who are your neighbors? Do they suspect anything? Are they *simpatico*? Where are good hiding places? Good escape routes? Any fresh water springs or other sources of water in the area? Can you slip in and out of your basecamp without being seen or looking suspicious?

Now, do you know people outside your group who you can ask for help who will not ask questions and do anything (within reason) to help you? These people are going to be the ones who will let your wounded comrades hide out in their homes until they are feeling better, who will help you acquire food and medicine, who will feed you and deliver messages to your above-ground supporters.

You will not succeed in your efforts without at least a nominal base of support. Your supporters need not adhere to your political views. They will help you out because they like you as people and think that you are passionate, even heroic. Do not do anything to expose these people to violence from the police and military. They are not combatants. They have not joined your militia. Keep away from them during times of heightened activity from the police and military forces.

At this same time, you should be propagandizing, letting the community know that there are people around who are willing to stop complying with the legal status quo. Through these efforts, you will better understand the community you are involved with.

This is the time to confront attitudes – both yours and others – and get a feel for who can be trusted and how far that trust can go. Be warned that this is a time when you are vulnerable to arrest and harassment by the police. Your propaganda methods should include flyers, graffiti, guerilla actions against billboards, banner drops, and any media at your disposal – print, radio, video – anything that you can use to explain why you feel the way you do. It is not important to convert people to your side at this point – the emphasis should be in setting the proper context for your consequent actions, so that when they begin, people will know what’s happening and why.

There is great controversy about when to actually begin your activities as a revolutionary fighting unit. Traditional Marxist strategy has always preached that “the people” should be prepared before there can be any chance for a revolution to be successful. Yet history has shown repeatedly that “the people” will start kicking ass long before any leadership has emerged. According to Che, the Cuban Revolution proved that an oppressed people sometimes only need a catalyst to prod them into action before they ignite into a mass movement, ready to sweep aside the old regime. History has also shown that in the ensuing chaos between the fall of the old and the start of the new order, there is a great danger of a cultish leader taking control of the revolutionary spirit in order to set himself up as the new dictator. The few times this did not happen, there have been great international efforts made to crush the Revolution before it sets an example the rest of the world could follow. These are both dangers that need to be considered during the development of the revolution.

Once your group has done the proper preparations and is ready to begin activities, there are new considerations: how do you keep the unit supplied with food and ammunition, what are your targets for attack, are you ready for a counter-strike by the enemy? There is a huge difference, psychologically, in pressing the attack and being attacked. In the former case, there is a feeling of control, you have met the enemy and are now going to kick his ass. When they come after you, however, there is a feeling of defeat from the outset. Coming under fire by your enemy is unnerving, but for the guerrilla band, it is more of an annoyance than anything else. Even when faced with far superior firepower and superior numbers, the guerrilla group can escape by stealth or directed assault, and use their superior knowledge of the area to make their get-away. More on this later.

Essential equipment

Here are the things each guerrilla soldier must have:

- a weapon
- a sleeping bag or wool blanket
- a backpack
- good boots
- a hammock

- a tarp
- some heavy clothing
- an ammo belt

These are the essentials. A mosquito net would come in handy during the warm seasons, and the guerrilla will do well to have some sort of dry food at hand whenever possible. Other things that could help out would include a small flashlight, a cup and small pan, a knife to use as a weapon, as well as one similar to a Swiss army knife. Some extra cord, string or twine for repairing equipment and stringing up the hammock and tarp is always a good idea.

The less stuff the soldier carries in the field, the more mobile the unit is. If your unit is operating in a safe, familiar area, you can stash things, like staple foods, medicines and extra ammunition and weapons in hidey-holes spread throughout your field of operations.

There should be one or two people outside the unit who can act as go-betweens when the unit needs things like food and medicine. It is not important for the whole unit to know these people, nor for them to know much about the unit. Also, you will hopefully have contact with organizations which support your actions. When the time comes to escalate your activities, these outside contacts will become sources for new recruits.

The Anarchist Guerrilla Group

There is usually not much rank in Anarchist groups. Decisions are often made by consensus, though this is not always possible. In the heat of a battle, when unexpected complications arise, a serious accident occurs, or during severe weather, someone or a few people may have to take the initiative to remedy the situation. If you know the people well and you are all comfortable with one another, the suggestions offered are usually well-thought-out and in the best interest of everyone involved. No Anarchist guerrilla should put themselves in the position of sticking rigidly to non-hierarchical principles, particularly if someone in the group is somehow incapacitated or delusional (*displaying symptoms of anxiety, paranoia, etc.*). The guerrilla should be able to trust fellow militia members to act in everyone's best interest. This is easier to do with people you've known a long time, or with whom you've faced enemy fire.

The typical Guerrilla group is small, between five and a dozen people. Any more than that and the odds of being spotted by the enemy are greatly increased. Any less and there are extreme limits to what your group can attempt and expect to survive. Though there should be no actual rankings amongst the guerrillas, there will usually emerge one or two people with organizational skills who will often serve as unofficial leaders due to their general competence. These people may not be the same people who are effective combat leaders. The differences should be respected, as well as acknowledged. People who have proven themselves under fire should be deferred to during times of crisis or difficult decision making, though they should never expect their fellow militia members to unquestioningly take commands. An Anarchist guerrilla group is a band of equals and everyone involved should treat one another with respect and affection. Any of you or all of you could die, any random time of the day or night.

When the conflict escalates, the group will hopefully grow and the experienced members will be thrust into leadership roles with new arrivals, and help them adjust to camp life, and teach them how to survive engagement with the enemy.

Again, through informal agreement, some people will step forward as leaders. It is worth noting that the successful small group leader will not always be as competent with a larger group. And the person unable to take the initiative with a small group of friends might find herself feeling responsible for the well-being of the new recruits. **Again**, let these naturally occurring roles manifest themselves, but always be wary of anyone who takes on too much responsibility. If that person were killed during an action, the group might find itself in deep shit. It is the responsibility of the *entire militia* to see that *all* the work is shared by *everyone*, so that there is always someone available to help out when someone else is lost due to injury or illness.

The ultimate expression of equality among revolutionaries would be to rotate leadership. It would get everyone a chance to gain experience. also, when the insurgent forces suffer losses, there will be no loss of experienced, capable people to help rebuild the group.

When the group has grown to ungainly size, it will need to split up. This creates a new difficulty – keeping in contact and coordinating actions. Therefore, any activities must be planned well in advance, though not necessarily in great detail. This difficulty will be compounded greatly the more recruits there are.

The time will come when the militia will have to expand its base of operations, or to relocate due to pressure from government forces. This is like starting all over again: new contacts to be made with the people in the area, new maps to be acquired, new terrain to be explored. This is a dangerous time for the group, and should be undertaken with a heightened sense of alertness. The initial forays into new territory should never be put off. There should be time available to send insurgents into new places without their field gear, just to pass through and scope things out. It is very important for these people to stay out of difficulties with the police in the new places, which is why self-imposed isolation and sobriety is always the best option. Then again, bars and lounges are great places to meet the locals, and get their tongues loosened.

Insurrection!

There are no hard-set rules for making your initial engagements with the enemy, but here are a few pointers:

Never engage the enemy in an attack that you cannot win. Don't send your infantry to assault a well-fortified airfield, for example, or attack a barracks outside your territory.

Always strike fast, with every weapon at your disposal, inflict the maximum amount of damage that you can and withdraw just as quickly.

Have your escape planned beforehand – and backup plans, too.

Select a rendezvous point where anyone separated during the fighting can catch up with the others.

Make every round of ammunition count. You'll likely never suffer from an over-abundance of ammunition.

Try to recover ammunition and weapons from fallen enemies. Indeed, many of your engagements will be solely for this purpose.

Don't panic if things don't go well. Get out as quickly as possible and try to make the enemy **regret** any pursuit attempted. Booby traps. Snipers. (*and in the 21st century, drones are a bit intriguing.*)

ALWAYS fire from a well-concealed position.

Not just behind a tree or rock, but laying on the ground behind a tree or rock. It is especially important to be on the ground behind a bush or in grass. If not, the enemy will likely see the discharge from your weapon and be able to aim at that. If you're on the ground, underneath some sort of foliage, the enemy may not even see your gun's blast. The smaller a target you present, the less likely you'll be hit. Also, make sure you're not trapped, in a place where any movement will expose you to enemy fire with no chance for cover. Though these may sound like obvious points, you will be surprised at what people will do in the heat of battle.

If your group can practice with paint guns for a while before using real weapons, you'll learn about the importance of cover pretty quickly.

If you are being pursued by an enemy column, always kill the lead man (the Point man). This will unnerve the enemy and make the point position difficult to fill. This tactic will sometimes divide the enemy against one another, as some soldiers may refuse to take a position that is going to result in their deaths.

Your first actions will likely not put a great deal of fear into your enemies. As a matter of fact, the enemy may not know anything about them. Traditionally, armed robberies are among the first ones, in order to provision your group with enough food and supplies to get started. In the U.S., a culture of dumpster diving and sharing excess has arisen, so this seems less necessary. Also, you may want to keep some money in reserve in case the group is forced out of their base of operations. Do not rob the families of the people who are your supporters, or who should be your supporters. Rob the wealthy, the powerful, and the local tyrants. You'll know who they are, the businesses they own, and where they live, *if* you've made the proper preparations. If you recruit from the families of influential business people and politicians, they will gladly assist with these tasks.

When you've pulled off your first outright "military" action, this should be followed by a propaganda effort, or propaganda should be made during the action, so that all will know what's going on. From this point on, the guerrilla is on enemy turf, until they have established complete control of some territory. Once this action is taken, the war is on and the guerrillas will be under constant harassment.

Defensive positions

You should have prepared several bunkers at different places throughout your base of operations. Here, you can store excess items rather than carry them around with you all the time. Also, these should offer some shelter, not only from the cold and rain, but also from light artillery, such as grenades launched from guns, and mortars. By burrowing into a hillside and heavily fortifying the entrance, you should be safe from almost anything the enemy throws at you, with the exception of direct hits by bombs, missiles, and heavy artillery.

Any time the unit is under fire and has to withdraw from an area, they should do so in an orderly manner. Several people should fall back and offer cover fire so that the others can pull out. These people will then take up firing positions so that the previously positioned guerrillas can then withdraw, too. And the process is repeated until the enemy breaks off pursuit. During such a strategic retreat, an experienced fighting unit may sometimes find itself suddenly in the possession of an easily defensible position. By regrouping there, they may be able to actually mount a counter-attack against the pursuing enemy. To do this, they must attack with great

energy and only if they have enough ammunition to sustain the attack. If they can successfully force the enemy into retreat, there will be opportunities to gather ammunition left behind by fallen enemy soldiers. Of course, when faced with superior numbers and firepower, the best idea is to leave the area as quickly as possible.

The Vietnamese were great at creating underground villages through elaborate tunnel systems. This was seen as such a brilliant, easily defensible, and useful strategy that local and federal police agencies often use it as an excuse to use incendiary devices and light-armor vehicles in assaults, like the ones against the Move house and the Branch Davidians. They were lying, of course, they just wanted to be able to leave no survivors.

Taking Action

In Central America, the **FSLN** of Nicaragua and the **FMLN** of El Salvador would occasionally pull off spectacular actions not only to display their capabilities, but also to humiliate their enemies.

They would capture the banquet hall where a member of one of the ruling families was holding a wedding reception, or loot and burn stores that belong to the rulers. The **Tupac Amaru** unsuccessfully attempted such an action in Peru when they took over the Japanese Embassy.

They committed two strategic mistakes in this action. They had undertaken the effort as an act of desperation, without really expecting to win the encounter. They also let it drag out far too long. They could have at least attempted to shoot their way out, thus giving their supporters and those in sympathy with them a chance to join in the fray. Had they engaged the army units surrounding them in a prolonged, hot, running battle, they very well could have set the entire city aflame with revolutionary fever. Who knows what could have happened? The people of Lima had already driven out the despised **Sendero Luminoso**, Peru's North Korean-obsessed QuasiMaoists.

Nevertheless, by carrying out such outrageous actions, the guerillas were illustrating to the people that the powerful were vulnerable. This would inspire admiration and respect, not only with the people in the *barrios*, but often in the ranks of the military as well. There are numerous incidents of high-ranking officers in the military, disgusted by the attitudes and behavior of the ruling elite, who would withdraw their troops into their barracks and withhold them from the fighting, then pledge themselves to the revolutionary government. This happened in Spain, in Russia, in Mexico, and to a lesser extent throughout Central America, too. Displays of bravery coupled with upright behavior (no rape of captives or cat-and-mouse games with prisoners of war) can win over to the guerrilla's side those who have been apathetic – or even opposed – to their actions. Still, never forget that not all who serve the powerful enjoy their roles.

In Vietnam, during their fight with the French and American occupation forces, and in Mexico – where the Zapatistas (*the actual Zapatistas, in the Mexican revolution of early 20th century*) fought against the federal government – the enemy's army could never locate the guerrilla units. They were hidden in plain sight, as it were. The very people working the fields, selling fruits and poultry by the roadside, and watching the little children in the village squares, were the same people who took up arms at night. The Mexican army, in particular, would declare that the Zapatistas had been exterminated every fall, only to be driven out of Chiapas and Morales every winter, once the harvest was in. It took them *years* to figure out where the guerrilla army was.

The focus of the guerrilla groups initial activities will be to disrupt the lives of the enemy forces as much as possible, and to cut off their supplies. With stealth and a few homemade weapons, the guerrilla band can attack airfields, convoys, and other means of supply the enemy will use. Mines that can be detonated by remote switches are always effective, as are homemade rockets. Shotguns can be converted into grenade launchers and simple explosive devices (black powder grenades, molotovs, etc.) can be fired with them. These simple, improvised weapons are highly effective, not only due to their offensive capacities, but also as a psychological weapon against the opposing soldiers, who assume you have nothing in your arsenal other than a few rifles.

One thing that has to be mentioned here are prisoners of war. Do not take prisoners. If possible, escort any surrendering troops to a border and tell them to get lost for the remainder of the war. Do not allow them to return to their bases. Since they will be fellow countryfolk, they may actually want to join your side! They must prove themselves under fire *before you can trust them with weapons!* Until then they can be treated as suspect new recruits.

Urban Warfare

Usually labeled as “terrorists,” the **Urban** guerrilla differs from the traditional “fighting in the fields” guerrilla in their base of operations. The **Urban** guerrillas are under much more intensive scrutiny than those in the woods and have to be careful not to arouse the suspicion of neighbors, as well as the police. But, they can hide out just as easily, have more targets to choose from, and can often stir up the locals to take part in their actions, even if they are only playing supporting roles. The **Sendero Luminoso** in Peru existed for years in the slums of Lima before the people there figured out the Maoists were ruthless, power-hungry, back-stabbing bastards, and routed them out – without the intervention of the police or military.

The urban guerilla should *take care not to blow up their neighbors*, like a faction of Weatherman did in NYC. Emma Goldman expressed regret that she and her co-horts at one time exposed their neighbors to such danger, which turned her against violent confrontation for a while. Of course, seeing the suppression of the Anarchists in Russia and the Ukraine made her once again propose armed conflict, and she enthusiastically supported the Revolution in Spain.

Urban guerrillas should also not engage in a firefight if there are many innocent bystanders in the line of fire, if it can be helped.

The history of urban guerrilla organizations is that the full weight of the state security apparatus comes down upon them, and most of their members are caught or killed. Not **all** of them. Ever.

The urban guerrilla band will never have the security that the “outdoor” guerrillas have, nor will they usually have the number of people involved in their day-to-day activities. Still, they will be able to maintain some sort of social ties to the outside world. This is both good and bad. It’s a security risk any time someone outside the group becomes familiar with one or more of its members. The good part is that the guerrillas don’t get lost in a fantasy world of revolution, and can more accurately assess their situation, then plan their actions accordingly.

Urban guerrilla activity is probably the best first step to take in a modern industrial state, though it is usually the last phase of the traditional revolution. Due to the amount of police informants, security forces, and military readily available to combat the guerrillas, it is advisable not to stay in one area for very long. Once a few actions have taken place, the guerrilla group can

split up and regroup later. This regrouping should be seen as a chance to gather together to plan the next operation and the group should have their combat supplies stored somewhere secure.

When the group is dispersed for any amount of time, there is no certainty that all the members will rejoin the group. Some may be arrested, or injured, or killed. And there is always the danger of being followed or turned in by someone familiar with the guerrillas, maybe even one of its members. In any case, treat a re-grouping with extreme caution, assume the worst and do not wait around for very long for any stragglers. They'll find a way to contact you if they need to.

Some final thoughts about Insurrection

Once a person begins down this road, it is difficult to turn back. Even if one surrenders, there is no guarantee the government forces will accept the surrender, or that they won't have you killed in prison.

Self-discipline is the key to security. Wandering away to have a fling with a local babe, getting drunk at a tavern, or trying to contact a missed person, could result in getting oneself and the entire group killed. Also, the ability to remain calm under duress is *extraordinarily* useful. For instance, if stopped by an agent of the state, try to determine what the matter is all about before whipping out a gun or grenade or taking cyanide. The agent in question could be asking around about something totally unrelated to your activities.

Try not to be fearful, but allow yourself to use fear to your advantage. Fear brings about a heightened state of alertness which can be quite useful at certain times. Believe in your ability to act. Before long, this will become automatic.

Study guerrilla tactics and read about revolutionary groups while pondering the issue.

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