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### **The Use of Snipers in the Military World: Training, Qualifications and Technologies**

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**Abstract.** Snipers are important instruments on the battlefield whose casualty-producing capability is an enormous force multiplier for companies and battalions. This article defines the role of the sniper on the modern battlefield and, also, the countersniper tactics, techniques, and procedures are regarded.

**Keywords:** sniper; military world; skills; weapon.

"You want to take out what's going to help your buddies the most"  
American Soldier

### **Introduction**

The sniper as "an elite military person operating often isolated from their own forces, having the mission of observing the area of operations, gathering raw data and intelligence, and striking by surprise important objectives of the enemy".

Military snipers are primarily used in a variety of missions on the battlefield, and the sniper's primary mission has nothing to do with pulling a trigger. The main battlefield role of the sniper is reconnaissance. Because snipers are masters of stealth, they are perfectly suited to sneak behind enemy lines to provide command with information about the enemy's size, strength and location [1].

### **Materials and methods**

The sources for this article are the authentic textbooks on world military technologies, sniper training, as well as some fundamental research of the sniper techniques by such scientists as Robert Valdes, Maj Plaster, Christopher Eger and Erdem Barışık.

The methods used in processing the material are: method of continuous selection, method of comparative contextual analysis, method of applied analysis.

## Discussion

Different countries use various military doctrines regarding snipers in military units, settings and tactics. Generally, a sniper's primary function in modern warfare is to provide detailed reconnaissance from a concealed position and, if necessary, to reduce the enemy's fighting ability by neutralizing high value targets (especially officers, communication and other personnel) and in the process pinning down and demoralizing the enemy [2]. Typical sniper missions include managing intelligence information they gather during reconnaissance and surveillance, target acquisition for air-strikes and artillery, assist employed combat force with fire support and counter-sniper tactics, killing enemy commanders, selecting targets of opportunity, and even destruction of military equipment, which tend to require use of anti-materiel rifles in the larger calibers such as the .50 BMG, like the Barrett M82, McMillan Tac-50, and Denel NTW-20 [3].



Military snipers from the US, UK, and other countries that adopt their military doctrine are typically deployed in two-man sniper teams consisting of a shooter and spotter [4]. A common practice is for a shooter and a spotter to take turns in order to avoid eye fatigue. In most recent combat operations occurring in large densely populated towns such as Fallujah, Iraq, two teams would be deployed together to increase their security and effectiveness in an urban environment. A sniper team would be armed with their long range weapon, and a shorter ranged weapon to engage and protect the team should enemies come in close contact.

### *Training*

There are many variations on sniper training. The designated snipers operate alone. They are specially trained in short courses to use a scoped carbine-caliber weapon at the platoon level to take targets of opportunity out to 1,000 feet. Scout-snipers are trained to a higher degree and typically carry larger caliber weapons (7.62x51 NATO all the way up to 12.7 mm). Scout snipers often train for four to six weeks in very demanding courses and operate in pairs on missions away from the main body of troops. Special operations snipers complete all of the aforementioned training but are specialized and trained to carry out their craft from airborne and seaborne platforms as well as conduct more unorthodox and longer missions [5].

**Stalking Skill.** The sniper must use the appropriate stalking skills while closing with enemies.

**Sheltering and Camouflage.** Sheltering protects snipers from enemy observation and camouflage will conceal their bodies, weapons and equipment in any terrain. The sniper must use the sheltering and camouflage skills effectively in order not to be seen by enemies.

**Distance Estimation.** In order to neutralize the target, the sniper must estimate the distance between himself and the target, and be able to adjust his weapon in harmony with this distance.

**Knowing Weapons and Equipment.** A sniper's closest friend is his rifle. Knowing the properties of his weapon and equipment, using them in harmony with weather, terrain and enemy conditions are required for success.

**Spotting Skill.** The sniper must maneuver to a position where he can observe enemy activity. The sniper with high spotting-skills can identify an enemy's weak points.

**Shooting Procedures.** The sniper must execute all steps of the shooting process from having a comfortable position to the trigger pulling phase.



**Accurate Shot.** The sniper will obtain to shoot accurately by implementing the rules of correct targeting

#### *Qualifications*

**Discipline:** The sniper must be disciplined while planning and be able to put the plan into action step-by-step.

**Initiative:** The sniper should take the initiative because he will accomplish his task independent from his company.

**Courage:** The sniper is required to close near enemy lines. Such a situation requires being brave.

**Patience:** Often the sniper may have to stay in the same position and location under negative weather conditions for long durations.

#### *Physical Characteristics*

Considering the terrain and weather factors, the sniper must have advanced physical skills in order to accomplish his tasks. For example, a duty which must be fulfilled in mountainous terrain and under heavy rain requires advanced physical conditioning [6].

#### *Technologies*

Countersniper TTP involve two types of actions: active countermeasures and passive countermeasures. Each has its place, depending on the METT-TC conditions under which the unit is operating. Most sniper countermeasures are not new TTP for well-trained combat troops. They are simply common sense actions taken routinely while in a combat area to limit exposure to fire, conceal positions, move tactically, and respond to enemy contact. Some countermeasures are not routine and require additional training emphasis. No matter which TTP are employed, successful countersniper measures present leaders with a challenge to maintain unit discipline. The sniper has the initiative. Units must not implement countermeasures halfheartedly. To do so invites casualties from snipers who can wait hours for the moment a unit's guard is down.

a. **Active Countermeasures.** Active countermeasures either detect and destroy the sniper before he can fire, or engage and neutralize him after he fires. Active countermeasures include the use of the following:

(1) **Observation Posts and Aerial Observers.** Observers can maintain a constant surveillance over potential sniper positions and detect snipers as they attempt to move into position for a shot. Once detected, snipers can be easily neutralized or forced to withdraw.

(a) Observation posts should have access to powerful spotting telescopes, medium-power binoculars, and night observation devices (thermal, if possible). Constantly scanning an area for the minute movements made by a well-trained sniper is exhausting. Therefore, personnel on OP duty should rotate frequently. However, a person who is intimately familiar with the area being scanned is most likely to notice a subtle change.

(b) As military and commercial lasers become more and more common, these devices may be used against US forces manning observation posts. Observers should be equipped with laser protective

glasses, especially when using direct-view optical devices. Laser protective glasses, binoculars with laser filters, and indirect-view optics protect observers from most available laser systems.

(c) Aerial observers can operate from any of several platforms. The modernized OH-58, with its sophisticated night vision capability, and the AC 130 have excellent capabilities to detect individual snipers around US positions. Any of several unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), with their extended loiter time and video/night vision capability, can also be used effectively.

(2) Patrols. Constant reconnaissance and security patrols around a unit's position hinder a sniper's getting into a firing position undetected. Small patrols are usually more effective.

(a) Enemy sniper teams are small and depend on stealth to approach a target along covered and concealed routes. Normally, they move to a hide or "shoot" position and remain there for long periods. These sniper teams are most effective when they have good fields of fire from 300 to 600 meters. At ranges of less than 300 meters, the sniper's movements and firing signature are more easily detected. A moving sniper who has been discovered by a small security patrol is at a great disadvantage. He lacks the firepower to fight a long engagement and is normally far from support or assistance.

(b) Small night security patrols using night vision devices can be very effective. Reconnaissance patrols should move by covered and concealed routes to good observation points, stop, observe, then move to another position. The patrol routes must vary, and a reaction force or supporting weapons must be ready if the patrol makes contact. Military working dogs and trained handlers can be useful in detecting enemy snipers. Dogs can quickly search large buildings for hidden enemy and can detect personnel at long range if downwind.

(c) In addition to reconnaissance patrols, small combat patrols are also effective. A variation of the ambush patrol is the stay-behind ambush. A small ambush element moves as part of a larger patrol and occupies its position without being observed. It then observes its kill zone, which may be very large if the element has a sniper team with it, and engages enemy snipers as they attempt to move into position.

(3) Unit Weapons. If an enemy sniper engages a unit, it may be authorized to respond with fire from all its light weapons. In an urban area, the direction of enemy fire, especially from a single rifle shot, is often difficult to determine. If a unit can determine the general location of a sniper, it should return suppressive fire while maneuvering to engage the sniper from close range. This is not always successful because a well-trained sniper often has a route of withdrawal already chosen. Massive return of fire and immediate maneuver can be effective against short-range sniper fires, if the ROE permit this response. In high-intensity urban combat, they are often the best immediate responses. Exploding fragmentation rounds, such as 40-mm grenades from the M203 grenade launcher, are the most effective suppressors.

(4) Overmatching Fire From Selected Weapons. The use of overmatching return fires against snipers can be very effective in high-intensity or precision urban combat. The 25-mm cannon on the BFV is a powerful and accurate weapon that can penetrate deep into buildings with its APDS rounds. Fires from caliber .50 machine guns were effective against snipers during combat in Panama in 1989. Units reported the snipers seemed to be intimidated into inaction by the immediate return of heavy machine gun fire. In Somalia, immediate heavy fires from MK 19 automatic grenade launchers were often effective at stopping sniper fires from armed irregulars. Light or medium antitank weapons are also effective. Because of their accuracy, guided munitions such as the TOW, Hellfire, Dragon, or Javelin have the added advantage of limiting collateral damage. Tank cannon can also be used to respond to sniper fire, although the danger of collateral damage is greater because of the extreme penetration of the round.

(5) Preemptive Fires. In high-intensity urban combat, preemptive fires can be used against likely sniper positions. This technique is more often used during offensive operations. It uses large amounts of ammunition but can be very effective for short attacks. Fragmentation fires from artillery, mortars, and grenade launchers are best for suppressing snipers whose position has not yet been detected.

(6) Projected Smoke or Riot Control Agents. Projected smoke that builds quickly is a good response to protect a unit from further casualties if engaged by an enemy sniper. It greatly limits his ability to acquire targets. The closer the smoke is placed to the sniper's location, the more effective it is. If the location of the sniper is unknown or cannot be reached by projected smoke, a smoke cloud established near the unit is still effective in reducing the sniper's chances of hitting a target. If the ROE permit, and permission has been granted for the use of riot control agents, they

can be used effectively to reduce the sniper threat. Few snipers can deliver long-range, accurate fires while wearing protective masks.

b. **Passive Countermeasures.** Passive countermeasures prevent the sniper from acquiring a clear target or prevent his fires from causing casualties. Many passive countermeasures are not unique to countering enemy snipers. They are common sense actions taken by well-trained infantry units in a combat area to limit exposure and minimize casualties. Passive countersniper measures are rarely successful by themselves. They may be politically and psychologically effective in terms of reducing US casualties and the level of violence, but they are often ultimately counterproductive to the commander's main mission. They tend to isolate US forces, especially during stability and support operations, when a visible presence is often required. They tend to create a siege mentality, and they pass the initiative over to the sniper. Among the most common passive countermeasures are:

(1) **Limit Exposure.** Consider the following when limiting exposure:

Use covered and concealed routes.

Avoid open plazas and intersections.

Stay away from doorways and windows.

Move along the side of the street, not down the center.

Move in the shadows.

Move dispersed, using traveling or bounding overwatch.

Avoid lighted areas at night.

Avoid being silhouetted against lights or the skyline.

Move quickly across open areas that cannot be avoided.

Remain crouched or prone behind cover or concealment whenever possible.

If troops are riding in the cargo area of trucks, keep the canvas cargo cover mounted to screen them. (This countermeasure may not be appropriate if there is threat of ambush by enemy forces in addition to snipers.)

Avoid gathering together in large groups in the open.

Remain dispersed.

Avoid wearing obvious badges of rank.

Avoid exaggerated saluting or standing at attention for officers while in the open.

(2) **Wear Protective Equipment.** The Kevlar helmet and protective vest will not always stop a sniper bullet, but they will significantly reduce the severity of wounds. They should be worn any time soldiers are exposed to potential sniper fire. In situations where dismounted movement across country is not required, request and issue soldiers special, heavy protective vests that are actually bulletproof. All unit members should wear this protection.

(3) **Use Armored Vehicles.** Whenever possible, move around the urban area in a protected vehicle with as little exposure as possible. Avoid open-sided cargo vehicles. Requisition or improvise vehicular armor against small-arms fire for all administrative and logistical vehicles.

(4) **Erect Screens and Shields.** Use simple canvas or plastic screens to make a dangerous alleyway or street crossing much safer for foot traffic. Adapt screens on windows to allow vision out while hiding personnel inside. Use moveable concrete barriers to provide protection for personnel at static positions. Use common items, such as rubble-filled 55-gallon drums and sandbags, to provide cover.

(5) **Deny the Enemy Use of Overwatching Terrain.** Either occupy such terrain with friendly forces or modify it to make it less useful to an enemy sniper. Pull down likely hiding places. Ensure all actions are in accordance with the laws and customs of war. Clear bushes and rubble. Board or brick up windows. Pile up earth and rubble in front of buildings to block lines of sight for snipers.

(6) **Use Smoke Hazes or Smoke Screens to Obscure the Sniper's Field of View and Limit the Effectiveness of His Fires.** A clear atmosphere is required for accurate long-range sniping. Smoke hazes can be maintained over broad areas for long periods without significantly hindering friendly operations. Smoke screens can be created quickly and sustained for short periods so US forces can accomplish their objective [7].

## **Conclusion**

As in every field, technologies and systems used in sharp shooting show rapid changes. Technology minimizes the various failures made by soldiers. The developments in weapon and ammunition systems may decrease the total number of snipers moving as a team and provide cost

advantages to armies. No matter how battlefield technology improves, this does not change the reality that snipers must have task planning skills, knowledge and training, and qualifications which are necessary to accomplish the mission.

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