



The Need For Snipers In The Light Infantry.

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Introduction

The new light infantry forces need snipers to increase their combat power. The most common remark made about light infantry forces is that they lack combat power. Because of specific design constraints, sizable increases to these units are not possible. Snipers, however, do not pose a sizable increase to these forces. The ability of snipers to deliver precise long-range rifle fire can be a significant increase to the combat power of light infantry forces. The history of twentieth century warfare documents many sizable contributions of snipers in combat. Examples of these contributions are recorded later. The following sections will then describe techniques of employing snipers in low to high intensity conflicts.

Historical Contributions Of Snipers

Often the word, sniper is used to describe any lone rifleman who takes "pot-shots" at exposed soldiers. To help clarify matters, we will use this definition from TC 23-14:

"A sniper is a soldier with special ability, training, and equipment who is designated to deliver discriminatory and highly accurate rifle fire against enemy targets which, because of range, size, location, fleeting nature, or visibility, can not be engaged successfully by the average rifleman."¹

The purpose of this section is to describe the capabilities of snipers through historical examples. One of the most famous feats of marksmanship in combat occurred in World War I by

Corporal Alvin C York. Separated from his unit Corporal York came upon a German defensive position. Through his remarkable marksmanship skill, Corporal York killed twenty Germans. The German unit was so demoralized by their losses, they surrendered. Corporal York single-handedly killed twenty soldiers and captured one hundred and thirty-two others. Corporal York received the Congressional Medal of Honor for this action. Although not a formally trained sniper, Corporal York's back-woods upbringing instilled in him the skills needed by snipers.²

The Germans were the first to introduce formally trained snipers in World War I. Their first snipers, like York, were originally hunters and woodsmen. Later, specially selected soldiers were sent back to Germany to attend a formal course of instruction. They were given select service rifles with telescopic sights mounted on them. The presence of these men was felt almost immediately:

"In one fortnight of trench warfare in December 1915, British troops sustained a total of three thousand, two hundred and eighty-five wounds. About twenty-three per cent of these were in the head, face and neck. It is a fair assumption that a great number of this latter category were caused by snipers."³

The psychological impact of snipers can be devastating to their enemies. This quotation was from a letter an English officer wrote home during World War I:

"Sergeant Dougherty was killed by a sniper whilst supervising a building fatigue. This is the eighteenth casualty and fourth NCO we have lost in this way since we came into the line Tuesday. It is a frustrating business."⁴

The English soldiers were so preoccupied with the German snipers, that they took elaborate measures to try to locate and eliminate them. One of the techniques used was to raise paper

maché heads up over the parapets of trenches to see if it drew sniper fire. If the "head" was fired upon, artillery would be brought down on the suspected sniper position.⁵ This fear or certainty of being killed is what probably caused those one hundred and thirty-two German soldiers to surrender to Corporal York.

The ability to remain hidden even while firing upon an enemy position is one of the most notable qualities of snipers.

"One black night the sniper crept close to the enemy trenches and found a good hiding place with good observation. The next morning when an enemy officer appeared the sniper killed him with one shot. He then stayed where he was all day, carefully plotting every Nazi movement and keeping the Germans dug in; when darkness fell he returned safely to his own unit."⁶

Throughout history, snipers proved themselves to be effective combat multipliers. This combat multiplier, used effectively, can compensate for the lack of power in light infantry forces.

Sniper Employment In Low Intensity Conflicts

The light infantry forces were created to face the increasing threat of low intensity conflicts throughout the world. A low intensity conflict as defined by FM 100-20 is :

"Internal defense and development assistance operations involving actions by US combat forces to establish, regain, or maintain control of specific land areas threatened by guerilla warfare, revolution, subversion, or other tactics aimed at internal seizure of power."⁷

During the initial stages of an insurgency, the revolutionaries, through acts of terrorism, demonstrate to the people the government's inability to maintain law and order.⁸ As these acts increase, the government through intelligence sources :

locates the towns or cities in which the guerillas probably operate and receive their support. To move into these areas with the intent of flushing out the guerillas will invariably cause harm to some of the civillians in the area. The grievances developed by the people against the government will only strenth- en the guerillas' cause. The sniper, on the other hand, can be emplaced to observe the suspected guerilla bases. When the guerilla leaders show themselves to politically indoctrinate the people, he can be easily eliminated with little risk to civillian lives and property. The sniper has now reversed the tables and has shown the guerillas to be helpless. As these operations continue, it is conceivable that the guerillas will voluntarily separate themselves from the people for fear of being killed. This will deny them their primary means of support and manpower.

Another technique employed by insurgent movements would be to organize political demonstrations and through an act of violence spark the demonstration into a violent uprising, causing the government to use violence to put down the riot. This act of violence can also be used to provoke violent actions by government officials against peaceful demonstrators, causing even more strife between the people and the government. A good example of this would be the guerillas using snipers themselves, to shoot at police or firemen executing their duties in the vicinity of planned demonstrations or political rallys. The government officials would be tricked into thinking the shots came from the crowd and would return fire killing innocent civillians. A well placed sniper team can do a lot to prevent these actions by spotting the guerilla gunmen and eliminating them, hopefully before they get a chance to start anything. If not, they will return fire against the actual gunmen and not innocent bystanders.⁹ Other operations snipers could be used in, ~~that~~ also pertain to mid and high intensity conflicts and will be discussed in the next section.

Sniper Employment In Mid To High Intensity Conflict

It was recently decided that light infantry units will be deployed to mid and high intensity conflicts. Mid and high intensity conflicts are those that involve two or more nations. If snipers were included with light infantry units, they would be a tremendous asset to them.

In offensive operations, detailed information about the enemy is absolutely critical. Snipers with their special stalking and camouflage skills, in addition to their telescopic sights, can provide the commander with detailed information about the enemy. Their ability to remain in place for long periods of time can also determine the enemy's routine as well as their dispositions.

In addition to their reconnaissance role snipers can also perform two special operations as determined by their commander. The sniper may be given the mission to maintain contact with the enemy while the rest of the unit prepares for the attack. While observing the enemy positions, the sniper may engage targets of opportunity. The sniper can either eliminate key leaders or engage anyone who exposes themselves. The loss of leaders can weaken the enemy's resolve and his ability to react to an attack. If the sniper engages all exposed personnel, then work to improve their positions will stop. You must also consider the psychological impact of the defenders. The second task a sniper could perform would be in preparation for a night attack. In order to assist the unit's ability to approach the objective the sniper team can clear an infiltration lane. They would remove any tree limbs and other debris along the route the unit will take to move onto the objective. The sniper would then guide the unit through this route. This technique would enable the unit to move right up to the objective without being compromised.

During the attack, the sniper becomes invaluable. The sniper, in a support position can eliminate key targets on the objective. These targets would include leaders, crew served

weapons, particularly anti-tank weapons, and at night he can destroy enemy night sights. Once the unit is on the objective, the sniper team will reposition themselves to observe the enemy retreat. As the enemy retreats, the sniper can eliminate personnel carrying key weapons with them. (i.e. RPK machine guns, RPGs, etc.) If the enemy begins to reorganize, the sniper can kill the leaders before they can rally a counter attack force. As the enemy moves away, the sniper can again maintain contact and continually harass them.

The sniper also plays an important role in the defense. The sniper team deployed well forward can observe the enemy advance and eliminate any exposed personnel. If given a radio, they can also call indirect fires onto the enemy. As the enemy continues to advance, the sniper team can link up with combat outposts. These outposts would consist of one third of the unit's forces and a few crew served weapons. This element would dig in forward of the main battle area and build dummy positions to deceive the enemy. The accuracy of the sniper's fire can easily trick the enemy as to how large a force he is facing, by inflicting many casualties onto his force. This will make the enemy believe he is fighting the main defensive positions and deploy early. Once the enemy is fully deployed, the outpost retreats to the main positions. This will allow the friendly commander to identify the enemy's main effort and concentrate his fires appropriately.

Within the defensive position itself the sniper eliminates key weapons providing support to the enemy attack. This prevents friendly units from being suppressed and insures that the maximum combat power is focused on the enemy's assault. The sniper can also identify the leaders of the assault and kill them. This will weaken the attack and the enemy's will to fight.

Armored vehicles pose a special problem to snipers, but, they are not immune from sniper fire. Before contact with the enemy is initiated, the vehicle commander will probably be exposed in their cupolas so that they can observe better. The vehicle commander is a very lucrative target because he is usually the only person in the vehicle that is cross-trained.¹⁰

Any further casualties suffered by that vehicle's crew would put it out of action either as a mobility kill or a fire power kill. BMP's are particularly vulnerable to snipers because the gunners must expose themselves to reload the Sagger or Spandrel missile.¹¹ The BTR 60 gives snipers plenty of opportunities to use their deadly skill. Without any doors, the soldiers inside must exit the vehicle from hatches on top, making them perfect targets. All vehicles have two other vulnerabilities to snipers. The first and most important is destroying the enemy's night sights. The active infra-red systems used by the Soviets and their allies are easily seen through our passive systems. The sniper, equipped with a PVS 4, can easily destroy these sights and effectively blind the enemy. If the enemy cannot see, then he cannot shoot effectively. The second common vulnerability all vehicles have is their antennas. The sniper can shoot off the enemy's antenna when the vehicle is stationary, cutting it off from the rest of his unit.

Conclusion

Light infantry forces have a very difficult mission. They are tasked to fight in low, mid and high intensity conflicts with very limited assets. The sniper throughout history showed that he can make significant contributions to any unit's capabilities. The sniper's versatility was then described through specific techniques utilized in low to high intensity conflicts. The historical examples of a sniper's combat power and his versatility in all types of conflict make snipers invaluable to the light infantry forces.

Notes

1. Sniper Training And Employment Headquarters, Department Of The Army, October 1969, Page 3
2. Saga Of The All-Americans, The Battery Press, P.O. Box 3107, Uptown Station, Nashville Tn 37219, 1946, Page 4
3. John Ellis, Eye Deep In Hell, Pantheon Books, New York, 1976, Page 68
4. Ibid.
5. Peter R Senich, The German Sniper 1914-1945, Arms and Armour Press, Lionel Leventhal Ltd, 2-6 Hampstead High St., London NW3 1QQ England, Page 16
6. Ibid. Page 405
7. Low Intensity Conflict, Headquarters, Department Of The Army, January 1981, Page 14
8. Ibid. Page 33
9. Sniper Training And Employment, Headquarters, Department Of The Army, October 1969, Page 118
10. The BMP: Capabilities And Limitations, Tradoc Bulletin Number 7,30 June 1977, Page 15
11. The Soviet Army: Troops, Organization And Equipment, FM 100-2-3, Headquarters, Department Of The Army, 16 July 1984, Page 5-22

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