

The Employment and Relevance of the Sniper

**U.S. ARMY SNIPER COURSE CADRE
2LT ROBERT G. MCMASTER**

From the earliest days of the rifled musket, the sharpshooter has been one of the most feared, and most mystifying, assets on the field of battle. Few battlefield elements have so captured the imagination as the sniper. The heritage of the sniper is one of legendary feats, master marksmanship, and impossible odds, proving even today that the sniper team is an invaluable asset capable of a multitude of tasks and mission types. It is this versatility that makes the modern sniper team the value-added force multiplier that it is.

The U.S. Army Sniper Course (USASC) has worked to evolve since its founding in 1987 to provide commanders with Soldiers who have the unique skillset and knowledge to fill sniper roles. Unfortunately, the employment of sniper teams can oftentimes be forgotten during operational planning and preparation, allowing these assets to go under-utilized. In response to this lack of utilization, USASC is determined to prove the relevance of snipers on the modern battlefield in large-scale combat operations. A fundamental misunderstanding of snipers, their role, and their capabilities exacerbates an already stressed Army sniper program. Further complicating matters, Soldiers who are developed through the sniper pipeline are often put into roles that allow their acquired sniper skills to stagnate or perish. For example, junior enlisted Soldiers might, after up to a year in a sniper section followed by completion of the USASC, find themselves as newly minted junior NCOs and sent to be team leaders. There is a very clear gap to bridge between operational planners and sniper employment. If the concept of the sniper is misunderstood, USASC and the Army are missing out on a pipeline with powerful potential during large-scale combat operations.



A student in the U.S. Army Sniper Course at Fort Benning, GA, practices the art of stalking targets on 18 June 2020. (Photo by Patrick A. Albright)

One of the sniper team's greatest contributions may be in its mobility and infiltration capabilities, providing the opportunity to conduct an array of missions, whether that is the disruption of enemy forces and activities, reconnaissance, or as a direct strike resource. The mastery of concealment and field craft, making use of both natural and synthetic resources to veil snipers from detection, allows them access to strategic positions on the battlefield to conduct their mission clandestinely. From unseen positions, sniper teams can fix enemy forces to a given location, forcing them to react to the will of the commander. Sniper teams can also conduct reconnaissance, identifying navigable routes for the following main body of the force or providing commanders with real-time intelligence and observations regarding terrain, infrastructure, and the strength, activity, size, and materiel of the enemy. Such a detailed understanding of the enemy can also make sniper teams an advantageous resource to call for fire, guiding artillery or mortar fire upon enemy positions. All these capabilities illustrate sniper teams as a force multiplier, providing commanders invaluable advantages on the modern battlefield.

Considering these and many more advantages and capabilities that snipers can provide commanders, it is surprising these assets are often less understood and undervalued. The Army has historically lagged to describe the ever-changing role of the sniper, and as a result, struggled to find a place for them to be impactful. The inefficient employment of sniper assets, coupled with budget cuts to a relatively young USASC, leaves modernization and innovation of sniper teams to be slower than the pace of the modern battlefield. As the Army marches on focused on large-scale combat operations, leaving snipers behind would be a lost opportunity to maximize the battlefield potential of these experts. Further examination of the role of snipers is warranted, and those at USASC are hopeful for impactful solutions that allow for advanced sniper training and greater retention and career longevity of snipers within the force of the future.

References

SSG John Sisk II, SSG Christopher Rance, SFC Joshua Jones, SGT Cody Perkins, and 1SG Kevin Sipes, "Closing the Gap: USASC Refines POI to Better Prepare Snipers for Modern Fight." *Infantry* (Spring 2020): 38-40, accessed from https://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/magazine/issues/2020/Spring/pdf/13_USASC_Sniper.pdf.

Andrew Dominguez, "Near-Peer Employment of Snipers," *The Company Leader* (27 March 2022), accessed from <http://companyleader.themilitaryleader.com/2022/03/27/near-peer-employment-of-snipers/>.

Haley Britzky, "Snipers Need Commanders to Learn How to Use Them," *Task & Purpose* (10 May 2022), accessed from <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/Snipers-commanders-training-combat/?amp>.

This article was edited by **2LT Robert G. McMaster** and is based on input from U.S. Army Sniper Course cadre (C Company, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment) at Fort Benning, GA.