

TRAINING NOTES



Sniper-Observer Teams

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One of the most potentially valuable but most overlooked tools available to today's commander is the sniper-observer team. U.S. Army doctrine concerning the employment of snipers dates back to 1969, and while Training Circular 23-24, *Sniper Training and Employment*, contains pertinent information, much of it has been rendered obsolete by advances in equipment and technology and changes in doctrine and the attendant tactics.

Recently, the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry developed and tested an advanced program that was designed to create highly-trained and effectively-equipped sniper-observer teams. The 82d Division has since adopted the program for use throughout the division.

In developing the program, the leaders of the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry felt that any sniper organization should be concerned as much with observing and reporting enemy activity as with shooting. Accordingly, their answer to the organizational problem was to form, train, and equip an 11-man sniper-observer squad (from the battalion's own resources) to augment the scout platoon of the battalion's combat support company. Now, each of the infantry battalions in the division has one of these squads, which consists of a squad leader and five two-man sniper-observer teams.

The overall concept behind the training and selection of the members of these squads is driven by a desire to find and field self-reliant, well-trained, and men-

tally and physically tough soldiers to increase the combat capability of the battalions.

For too long, sniper training had been "shooter" training only. This overemphasis on marksmanship had resulted in soldiers who could shoot well on a rifle range but who could not adequately perform the doctrinal missions required of snipers. The division's solution is a training program in which specially chosen soldiers—each of whom is a volunteer—attend an Army Marksmanship Training Unit (AMTU) sniper course to hone their shooting skills and become versatile combat snipers. But first, they must go through a tough selection process, which consists of four phases:

Records Screening. A thorough check of the soldiers' records and psychological screenings are conducted to ensure that the soldiers allowed into the program have no history of substance abuse, disciplinary action, or mental instability.

Recommendation by Company Commander. To be accepted for the program, a soldier must be recommended by his company commander.

Selection Course. This is a five-week course, part of which is conducted away from Fort Bragg in North Carolina's Uwharrie National Forest. The part of the training program in that location includes instruction in land navigation, stalking, mission planning, intelligence, communications, ballistics, rappelling, and air assault operations. The sniper-

observer candidates are then brought back to Fort Bragg where they learn how to call for fires from a supporting 81mm mortar unit and how to direct close air support strikes by A-10 aircraft. The final part of the course is a demanding four-day land navigation exercise conducted both in the national forest and on Fort Bragg.

Commander's Board. Finally, the would-be sniper-observers take a written test on all of the subjects covered in the course and submit peer evaluations on the other candidates. Then they appear before an assessment board chaired by the commander of the battalion conducting the training. The board's purpose is to test each soldier's ability to think and act under pressure.

The 11 members of a battalion's sniper-observer squad are then selected on the basis of the results of the land navigation exercise, the peer evaluation, the written test, and the board's evaluation.

Follow-on training for the members of each squad includes the AMTU sniper course and weekly sustainment firing periods. (The 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry feels that at least 50 rounds per man per week are needed to maintain its standard of a first-round kill at 350 meters and a second-round kill at 600 meters.) Some of the sniper-observers may also attend the counter-sniper course at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Sniper-observer teams are used as of-



ten as doctrinally feasible. When not employed, the squad leaders plan training that will sustain and add to the skills each man developed during the course.

The three missions considered most productive in combat situations for the sniper-observer teams are related to defensive operations—in a covering force, in the defense of the main battle area, and in a stay-behind role following a delay or withdrawal by the parent battalion.

With a covering force, the teams can delay or disrupt an attacking enemy by directing their fires at such key enemy personnel as tank commanders and unit leaders. They can also observe and report enemy troop concentrations, or they can direct their own artillery and other supporting fire against enemy formations. (The latter method of employment is particularly useful at choke points, which are abundant in Europe as well as on other

potential battlefields throughout the world.)

Within a main battle area or in a stay-behind situation, the sniper-observer teams perform similar missions. Urban terrain, in particular, lends itself to the employment of snipers. The teams can also be used to effectively cover obstacles and, in certain situations, to force enemy mechanized units to dismount.

OTHER MISSIONS

These three missions certainly are not the only ones that sniper-observer teams can perform. The teams can be used in raids, for example, and in other similar offensive operations. In fact, a wide range of possible uses is available to a commander.

In developing this sniper program, the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry did find that

while the team members should be equipped to the fullest extent possible with their normal individual equipment, some special equipment is essential for each team—a sniper rifle, a set of binoculars, and a radio. In addition, some other equipment will make the teams even more effective—a spotter scope, a laser rangefinder, secure communication equipment, and special camouflage uniforms.

Unfortunately, although the Army's current M21 sniper weapon system, which consists of an accurized M14 rifle with an ART-11 scope and an M49 spotter scope, may be an acceptable general-purpose system, as a sniper system it has a number of deficiencies. For example, a user cannot perform any maintenance on the system that requires disassembly of the rifle. Also, the scope cannot be taken off the rifle without the loss of zero, and this makes it impractical for use by an airborne sniper-observer team.

(The 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry tested an alternate weapon, the McMillan M82, which is currently used by selected units within the Department of Defense. The battalion found this an excellent weapon that increased the combat capabilities of its sniper-observer teams.)

The AN/PRC-77 radio, while not ideal, is widely available, and it is adequate under most circumstances. When used with VINSON equipment (which gives it a secure communication capability), a long whip or field expedient antenna, and a headset, it enables an observer to report intelligence data, receive missions, or adjust fire on targets. The headset frees the observer's hands for using his spotter scope, laser rangefinder, or binoculars.

As part of the program, each team member constructs his own "Ghillie suit," a special camouflage uniform made from a fatigue uniform reinforced in the front to allow sustained low crawling without damage and with a net attached to the top and additional camouflage on the back. The team members put on these suits when they arrive at their objective rally point (ORP) and wear them on their approach to and while in their firing and observing positions.

Future implementation of the program

includes leader training in sniper employment, procurement of another sniper rifle, and additional selection courses to maintain fully manned and trained sniper-observer squads. The division has submitted an MTOE change for a nine-man sniper-observer squad and has strongly recommended that an 11-man squad be included in Army of Excellence organizations. (More detailed information on the selection, training, and use of sniper-

observer squads can be obtained from the Commander, 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28307.)

The dividends to be gained from developing sniper-observer squads far outweigh the resource requirements they demand in terms of manpower spaces, equipment, and dollars. By providing a commander with an additional combat capability, these squads increase the

readiness of any infantry battalion to fight and win on a modern battlefield.



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Tactical Logistician

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Our brigade and battalion S-4 officers, along with the others in the logistical chain, are responsible for fueling and fixing our vehicles and weapon systems and for feeding and arming their operators. On the battlefields depicted in Field Manual 100-5, these logisticians will have to accomplish their tasks in a variety of combat operations by determining how to get what is needed to the point where it is needed at the time when it is needed. They must be able to select the correct course of action and carry it out under adverse conditions as well.

Unfortunately, our normal peacetime training leaves tactical logisticians less than fully prepared for such combat situations. Both peacetime constraints and training emphases hinder their on-the-job development and training. In particular, three aspects of training limit the kinds of problems an S-4 must solve and may even prevent him from considering other problems.

First, logistics for any field training exercise (FTX) is normally limited to what is necessary for the play of the exercise. This aspect of the problem acknowledges that logistical assets are too precious to be prepared, expended, or used when they are not needed. It also acknowledges that manning levels are not high enough to allow fictitious operations to be

planned and monitored when there are actual ones that must take place. Thus, the emphasis is usually placed on supporting a particular FTX, with little question of how that support would be done in combat. Whatever support is not needed is never addressed or planned for. Although this conserves precious assets, it also limits opportunities for planning and executing the handling of these assets.

LIMITED

The second aspect of the problem concerns the physical limitations of today's training areas. This simply acknowledges that maneuver units cannot conduct offensive and retrograde movements over the distances the writers of the FM's envision for the future battlefields. In addition, maneuver units in an FTX rarely employ all forms of combat support and combat service support. Live fire events are usually limited in scope and duration, and this means that S-4s and the CSS system are less than fully exercised.

During most field problems, S-4s are rarely required to operate at extended distances from their supply base and their support units, or with a challenging array of requirements. Even the size and the complexity of the trains may be re-

duced to a deceptively simple level. In short, in the logistical environment found in many field training exercises, management and span of control problems are greatly reduced.

The third aspect involves the importance of brigade and battalion level FTXs to the commanders concerned. Maneuver units pour a great deal of effort into planning and preparing for such an event, because many of their critical training tasks can be done only during an FTX. It is therefore quite natural that commanders should demand that every possible step be taken to support the exercise. This emphasis is well placed, but its results must also be considered.

In actual practice, CSS is rarely ever interrupted or limited—the support of the FTX is the end purpose; the training of the tactical logistician is secondary. Good units do stress training in communications, security, camouflage, and fieldcraft of all types, but this, unfortunately, is not the type of training in question. The S-4, for example, rarely gets to move and set up field trains in new locations during darkness. His span of control is not tested, and he is not required to support and move at the same time. He may practice noise and light discipline on resupply runs but may never get a chance to attempt a throughput operation