

The U.S. Army Sniper School

Selecting the Best Students

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS EARL S. ELLIS

The U.S. Army Sniper School — a three-week course conducted at Fort Benning, Georgia — is designed to train soldiers to engage key selected targets with long-range precision fire and to use the techniques of sniper fieldcraft.

Unfortunately, too many leaders who send soldiers to the school choose them at the last minute on the basis of who wants to go or who can be spared most easily from a unit for three weeks. This type of selection process is typical of a lack of command involvement, or simply a lack of understanding about the Sniper School, its mission, and its prerequisites for attendance. As a result, many of these soldiers do not meet the course's prerequisites and have to be returned to their units.

The course's 192.5 hours of instruction consist of 31.8 hours of conference or lecture and demonstration, 158.7 hours of performance oriented practical exercises, and a two-hour written examination. The areas of instruction include the following:

- Organization, use, and employment of snipers.
- Command and control.
- Combat orders (mission planning).
- Camouflage and concealment.
- Selection, construction, and occupation of positions.
- Movement and engagement.
- Silent movement techniques.
- Target detection and selection.
- Sniper field sketch, range card, and logbook.
- The threat.
- Range estimation.

- Sniper marksmanship.
- Sniper training program.

Upon completion of the course, students are awarded a U.S. Army Infantry School diploma and the additional skill identifier (ASI) of B4.

Commanders, therefore, should make every effort to see that only their best qualified soldiers are sent to Fort Benning to undergo this important and beneficial training. A potential student



must meet the following prerequisites (as specified in DA Pamphlet 35I-4, Army Formal Schools Catalog, 1 Oct 90):

- Must be male, CMF 11, in the rank of private first class to sergeant first class (rank may be waived), active duty or reserve component.
- Must have a GT score of 110 or higher, good performance ratings with no history of alcohol or drug abuse, and no record of disciplinary action.
- Must be recommended by his commander.

- Must be in excellent physical condition (70 percent or better in each event of the Army Physical Fitness Test, APFT), and have corrected vision of 2200-20/20.

- Must be knowledgeable of CMF 11 Skill Level 2 tasks and be an expert marksman.

If commanders do not get involved in selecting the soldiers to attend the course, the sniper students are likely to fail in one or more of the following areas:

Marksmanship Proficiency. Several times in the past, a sniper student's ability to fire Expert with any consistency has been assumed but not properly documented, and the student has not been able to attain the course's 80 percent standard for marksmanship. Potential students must master the basics and should properly demonstrate their mastery of them during rifle qualification at their home stations and before they are selected for the course.

Physical Conditioning and Stamina. Students who cannot achieve at least 70 percent in each area of the APFT may not be able to complete the rigorous training they will undergo at the Sniper School. A lack of fitness can prevent them from completing the performance-oriented training in the course, while the fatigue that results from it can reduce mental clarity.

Mental Preparation. Potential sniper candidates must be aware that, in addition to receiving training in delivering long range precision fire, they are being trained for employment in extended operations with little to rely

upon except their buddies and themselves.

Minimum GT Score and Technical Proficiency. To succeed during the course's performance oriented testing, students must be able to grasp the technical data quickly and must rely heavily on their land navigation, mission planning, communications, camouflage, and movement skills. The minimum GT score of 110, along with a proficiency in all Skill Level 2 tasks, will help ensure successful completion of the course.

Motivation. The Sniper School is considered one of the most physically and mentally demanding courses the Army has to offer. In addition to having to learn ballistics, ammunition types and capabilities, adjustment of optical instruments, and range estimation procedures, snipers must also display initiative, decisiveness, self-reliance, good judgment, and common sense. Accordingly, sniper candidates must be selected from personnel who are highly motivated and have a positive attitude.

Retainability. A commander may decide to reward a soldier's good performance with an opportunity to attend the sniper course, but if the

soldier does not have at least a year of retainability, this training will not benefit either the unit or the Army.

A commander can simplify his selection process by creating a sniper indoctrination program similar to a pre-Ranger training program. If that program is made a part of the sniper sustainment program as spelled out in TC 23-14, competition for a slot will then give the unit better qualified potential snipers.

The soldiers selected to attend the indoctrination program should meet, at the least, the prerequisites as outlined in DA Pamphlet 351-4. Then, the training they receive in the indoctrination program should be both mentally and physically demanding, and should include the following:

- Zeroing and practice fire.
- Field firing (unknown distance).
- Observation and target detection.
- Range estimation.
- Concealment and concealed movement.
- Land navigation.
- Call for fire.
- Communication procedures.
- Physical training.

Once a soldier has completed the

indoctrination program, the commander should review his training records and conduct a personal interview with him. Then, the commander, when he is fully satisfied with the soldier's readiness, should certify on DA Form 4187 that he meets the prerequisites for the Sniper School.

The diligent screening of potential snipers by unit commanders will ensure that only the best soldiers are sent to the U.S. Army Sniper School; those soldiers, in turn, when they graduate, will then provide their commanders with invaluable combat multipliers.

Additional information on the course's prerequisites and program of instruction is available from Commander, 2d Battalion, 29th Infantry, ATTN: USASS, Fort Benning, GA 31905-5000; telephone DSN 784-7455/7438 or commercial (404) 544-7455/7438.

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The Neglected M16 Magazine

MAJOR THOMAS H. BAKER

In many units, soldiers are not issued magazines for their individual weapons. The magazines are usually transported from the supply room to the range in footlockers or other makeshift containers. Other units temporarily issue magazines to the soldiers, then collect them and store them at the ammunition point on the range. In either case, the intent is to have the magazines loaded by the personnel manning the ammunition

point instead of by the individual soldiers, and to promote ammunition accountability and speed range operations.

Some may wonder, "What's wrong with that? After all, this is what they do in initial entry training, and it is officially encouraged by doctrine and regulations." But such practices cause a lot of problems:

First, the magazine is an important

part of the rifle and should be mated with a specific weapon. Because of dimensional differences in both weapons and magazines caused by manufacturing and wear, a magazine that is fully functional in one weapon may not function at all in another. Too, our current zero and qualification practices do not permit our soldiers to fire fully loaded magazines to insure that they function properly in a particular