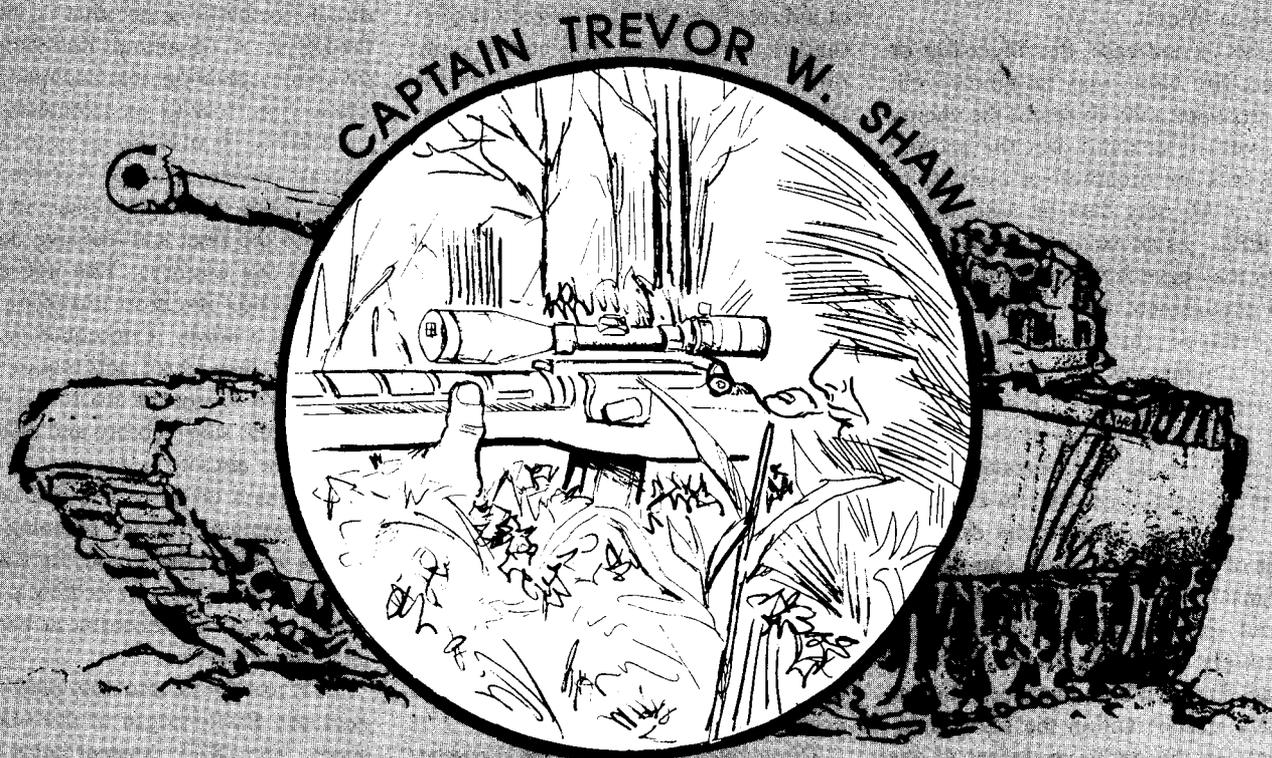


MECHANIZED INFANTRY SNIPERS



The use of snipers in mechanized infantry units has been inhibited by several factors—unstructured, incomplete training; a lack of specific methods of employment; and a misconception that snipers are not useful enough.

Unfortunately, there is little useful information on the organization of mechanized snipers; their requirements for centralized training; and Training Circular (TC) 23-14, *Sniper Training and Employment*, does not deal in depth with the employment of mechanized snipers.

As a sniper-qualified officer with a good deal of experience in mechanized operations at platoon and company levels, I believe I can shed some light on the need for snipers in a mechanized battalion and, more important, the way a battalion should organize, train, and employ its snipers. These measures, competently carried out, will improve upon the rifle company's capabilities and also increase its ability to support its dismounted infantrymen.

The primary mission of any sniper team—including a mechanized sniper team—is to deliver long-range precision fire on key personnel and targets. But the battleground on which a mechanized sniper team operates—a battleground with armor protection, heavy and rapid firepower, a fast operational tempo, and long distances—is indeed different. In such conditions as these, the effectiveness of a dismount-

ed, antipersonnel weapon with a slow rate of fire may seem to be of little use.

Add a lack of clear doctrine for selecting, training, and employing mechanized snipers, and the sniper rifle is apt to become a permanent fixture inside the company arms room.

Although these problems appear to be substantial, they must not deter a mechanized battalion from training its snipers. A sniper team offers a company commander capabilities that are not available with any other weapon system:

- The sniper team can support dismounted infantry in situations where the Bradley infantry fighting vehicle (BIFV) is either ineffective or inappropriate. This is done with accurate rifle fire at ranges beyond the capabilities of the soldiers' standard issue weapon.
- The sniper team is patient and stealthy and can strike without being compromised.
- The team can selectively destroy key targets with no collateral damage.
- Snipers are a hip-pocket intelligence source and a dedicated counterreconnaissance force.
- The sniper team remains the only truly effective countermeasure against trained enemy snipers.
- The mere presence of snipers has an immeasurable psychological effect upon the enemy.

The organization of the sniper teams in a mechanized infantry battalion differs significantly from the light battalion organizations. In its present form, this organization has been a doctrinal hindrance from the beginning.

A light battalion has a sniper squad in the scout platoon, with a staff sergeant—a school-trained sniper—as squad leader, who is in charge of all sniper training. Due to their organization, light snipers are primarily a centralized battalion asset that has a close working relationship with the S-2. The battalion has enough training experience and intelligence information to decide where a sniper team is best used.

For example, snipers can be attached to a company, on a screen line with the scouts, or on a specialized mission such as an infiltration to reduce a high-priority target. In turn, when the snipers are not being used in a sniping role, they are fully trained scouts and act in this capacity as additional eyes for the S-2. The U.S. Marine Corps feels so strongly about this dual capability that its snipers are officially labeled *scout/snipers*. This organization of centralized training and employment has been popular for the snipers of most nations for the past 80 years. Its superiority almost guarantees that it will remain the organization of choice for years to come.

As opposed to the light infantry battalion, the mechanized battalion has one sniper team assigned to each of its four rifle companies. Although this organization is designed to give each company its own sniper team—something that even light battalions do not enjoy—there are no dedicated slots in the tables of organization and equipment (TOEs) to accommodate the existing rifles, and the companies rarely have the knowledge or the assets to ensure that these snipers receive competent training.

The challenge, then, is to ensure that the snipers in mechanized infantry battalions are as well trained as those in light battalions. This challenge cannot be met unless more emphasis is placed on centralized training, and centralized training cannot be done without competent, trained leaders who understand snipers and their employment.

In a situation that is not well-defined by doctrine, snipers use the phrase “common sense and imagination” to govern their training and employment. Common sense dictates that dedicated snipers be trained by knowledgeable leaders to become competent in the art of sniping; and imagination is required to accomplish this task within the modified TOE of the mechanized infantry battalion.

If a training plan is to work, a mechanized battalion must adhere to these four imperatives:

- The battalion must be committed to training competent snipers and also to providing funds for the snipers’ supplies and equipment.
- Each company must select qualified and retainable personnel (see requirements in TC 23-14) to fill the two sniper-team positions for no less than one year. These two soldiers must then be assigned to the same team in the same platoon.
- At least one student billet per battalion must be guaranteed at the U.S. Army Sniper School at Fort Benning.
- Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) instructors must be

scheduled to teach these soldiers basic and advanced marksmanship with the M24 sniper weapon system. If all four of these imperatives are met, the training plan can proceed with ease.

Where do these snipers come from?

Under the current mechanized infantry organization, in each rifle company, two enlisted soldiers are “dual-hatted” as snipers within a rifle squad. This has superseded the former organization, which placed the sniper team in the company headquarters platoon. It is a logical step forward, as the mechanized company headquarters platoon was not capable of sustaining sniper training. More often than not, a dedicated sniper team in a headquarters platoon assumed additional, and eventually permanent, duties as wheeled vehicle drivers or assistant training and supply NCOs. Unfortunately, these additional jobs always seemed to assume more importance than sniper training.

Although “dual-hatting” within a platoon solves the former problems, it often produces a soldier who is “jack of all trades, master of none.” If the company is to have competent snipers, therefore, these soldiers must be dedicated snipers who are trained in all aspects of platoon and company operations.

The two soldiers to form the sniper team must be chosen for their competence and maturity rather than on the basis of their availability or the position they presently occupy. No matter how the team is arranged, it should be organic to a platoon. In this way, the sniper team sustains its basic infantry skills during platoon training and is not assigned duties that detract from that training. Additionally, the platoon becomes familiar with sniper operations and incorporates the team into its tactical SOP.

To become proficient at their art, however, the snipers must have capable, knowledgeable, and motivated leaders. The leadership for the sniper training program is based on the concept of a *master sniper* and a *sniper employment officer*. These two leaders form the heart of the battalion sniper training program, but they are strictly trainers. They are not necessarily required to participate as snipers during any type of field exercise other than training events that specifically involve snipers.

This system provides centralized training by knowledgeable leaders within the framework of normal battalion operations. The training of snipers concurrently with field operations will complement—not detract from—scheduled training.

Leaders responsible for sniper training should be selected from the S-3 and S-2 sections. Involving the S-3 section helps remind the battalion to integrate the snipers into company operations, and the S-2 section provides expert instruction on the snipers’ secondary mission of collecting battle-field information.

The master sniper is in charge of both field training and marksmanship training for all the snipers in the battalion. He trains the snipers to advise their leaders on their proper employment. He must attend the U.S. Army Sniper School and observe the AMU training of his battalion’s snipers.



Marksmanship training provides a good basis for the soldiers selected as snipers.

The ideal choice for the master sniper position is the assistant operations sergeant, in the rank of staff sergeant or sergeant first class. If the assistant operations sergeant is not available, any mature and capable operations sergeant can be chosen. *(One word of warning: The Army Sniper School is tough, and soldiers who do not have previous sniper experience often fail. To succeed, the prospective master sniper must have a strong desire to complete the course and be physically fit and proficient in all the basic soldier skills.)*

The sniper employment officer is primarily responsible for training and advising the company commanders and platoon leaders in the proper employment of their sniper teams. He is responsible for training snipers in enemy recognition, enemy and friendly tactics, and intelligence gathering. Finally, he is responsible for coordinating the use of all range facilities and training areas as well as any logistical requirements to support this training.

The ideal choice for this job is the tactical intelligence officer in the S-2 section, who is already an expert on threat forces and intelligence gathering. The liaison officer in the S-3 section is another good candidate for this job.

If possible, both the sniper employment officer and the master sniper should attend the sniper school. Although the school does not make a habit of including officers as students, it is possible when a billet is open.

How the Plan Works

Once he has completed the sniper school, the master sniper has the necessary knowledge to conduct sniper field exercises and fieldcraft training.

Next, the AMU associated with the division or brigade should be scheduled to train the snipers in advanced marksmanship skills. The G-3 usually schedules the marksmanship training teams and the team can usually conduct this training so long as they are not scheduled elsewhere. The AMU instruction takes about two weeks and teaches the snipers excellent skills.

The battalion snipers who have successfully completed this training are intimately familiar with the M-24 sniper weapon and confident in their ability to hit man-size targets out to 800 meters. Additionally, they learn observer skills and can make accurate wind estimations and adjust the sniper's aim.

After this instruction, the master sniper and the sniper employment officer conduct a week-long block of training on sniper fieldcraft, followed by a field training exercise such as the one outlined in TC 23-14 and ARTEP 7-92-MTP.

Once the sniper employment officer has supervised the initial battalion training, he prepares a block of instruction on the employment of snipers in a mechanized company and

platoon and presents it to all the company commanders and platoon leaders.

When the initial battalion sniper training is completed, more advanced training is conducted quarterly, as well as during weekly team training. Most brigade or division size units have weekly training time reserved for the NCOs to train soldiers at team or squad level. Once or twice a month, the master sniper and the sniper employment officer conduct classes during this time on more advanced subjects and on such skills as enemy identification, call for fire, and secure communication procedures.

Quarterly, the master sniper and the sniper employment officer conduct a sniper range and sniper sustainment exercises. This requires a five-day block of instruction that strengthens the skills they learned in their initial sniper training.

An extremely useful method for this quarterly training is the multi-purpose range complex (MPRC) found on most mechanized infantry posts. Its array of both stationary and moving personnel targets makes it the best live fire training a sniper team can receive. Once the first year of training has been completed, snipers can be rotated within the companies, and the process can begin again.

Employment

In the defense, there are certain missions that naturally lend themselves to effective sniper employment:

- Support of the company defensive position.
- The economy-of-force mission.
- Counterreconnaissance.
- Cover for obstacles and restricted areas.

In a defensive battle position where there is a dismounted enemy avenue of approach, it is common to separate the dismounted element from the vehicles. In this situation, the snipers can be used within the dismounted positions against such key targets as enemy leaders and heavy weapons crews. It is best to place the sniper team on the flank of the dismounted position where they can cover the unit's entire front. It also relieves the sniper position from the brunt of the attack, which then allows the team to select and rank key targets more deliberately, and thus more effectively.

Another technique is to place the sniper team forward when the company is in a reverse-slope defense. This gives the commander an observation element forward of his position that can make precision kills and also adjust mortar or artillery fire.

In cases where a dismounted enemy avenue of approach is available but unlikely to be used, a sniper team is a useful option. The team can cover the secondary avenue to disorient, detain, and possibly stop an enemy attack force, thereby allowing most of the company's combat power to orient on the more likely avenue of approach.

In addition, snipers positioned to the rear or on the flanks of the company can give the commander early warning of enemy flanking movements. Such economy-of-force missions are commonly needed, but rarely are personnel available in the mechanized infantry company who can perform

these missions with the same deadly efficiency as the snipers can. A sniper is a natural choice for such roles; the accurate fire from the sniper rifle will enable the team to kill, not just suppress, relatively large numbers of exposed personnel. Such marksmanship historically stalls or halts attacks, especially when the attacker's leaders are eliminated quickly.

The sniper team may be the best counterreconnaissance force organic to the infantry company. These soldiers are trained in sustained observation, concealment, threat recognition, and indirect fire procedures.

A company should place its sniper teams forward of the company position at a distance to be determined by an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). The snipers can construct a hide position from which to observe enemy movement that has infiltrated the scouts' screen line. When there is little chance of compromise, the sniper team can choose to engage enemy reconnaissance teams with their weapons. To avoid detection, they can call for mortar fire or direct a counterreconnaissance platoon to the enemy position.

By selecting a position along a probable mounted avenue of approach, the counterreconnaissance sniper team can contribute to the main battle by engaging enemy echelons on the way to their objective.

A sniper team is ideal for covering obstacles with direct fire, especially those that are difficult or impossible to cover from the main battle position. Obstacles that block or channel will either stop a mechanized formation or slow it down enough that it will change direction. Either way, the sniper benefits because targets are presented in both scenarios. If the enemy must dismount to breach an obstacle, then the sniper can engage the breach force personnel. If mechanical means are used to breach the obstacle, or if the formation is merely slowed, the sniper can choose vehicle commanders as his targets. The engine and track noise of massed armored vehicles is usually enough to mask the sniper's fire. During a normal attack, the identification of a team's position by an armored unit is extremely difficult.

Although a sniper is at his best during defensive or static operations, he is also effective in the offense. The following are primary offensive missions for a sniper:

- Overwatch for the dismounted movement of infantry.
- Elimination of enemy snipers, key personnel, machine-guns, and antitank weapons.
- The economy-of-force mission.
- Concentration of fires on fortified positions.

During mounted movement, the sniper team is of little use; it becomes an asset only when it dismounts. Unfortunately—due to the noise of cannons, engines, and tracks in a mechanized attack—the mechanized infantry sniper often loses stealth, his best ally. Additionally, the sniper team's placement on the battlefield is determined by the Bradley commander rather than by the team itself. The sniper team must act quickly and boldly to overcome these two disadvantages.

To support dismounted movement, the sniper team imme-



Mechanized infantry snipers use camouflage and concealment to help them regain the advantages they lost when they dismounted.

diately searches for dominant terrain with good fields of fire oriented toward the objective or the enemy threat. Once this is done, the snipers use camouflage and concealment to help them regain the advantages they lost when they dismounted.

At this point in the attack, communications between the sniper team and the platoon leader or company commander become critical. The snipers must tell the dismounted element when they can no longer support its dismounted movement. The platoon must then allow the sniper team to displace and find a new firing position.

The sniper team excels at supporting infantry on the objective. The team's precision fire enables the snipers to continue engaging the enemy long after the BIFVs and M113s have shifted or lifted their fires.

The question of who controls the sniper team is a matter of METT-T. On a movement to contact, the lead platoon should always be the one that contains the organic sniper team. This enables the sniper team and the platoon to become the support element upon initial enemy contact.

If the mission is more specific, as in a screening mission or a mission against a pre-planned objective, the sniper team may be detached in support of the company. This means the snipers may ride either with the company commander or in the executive officer's track to get to specific locations. Additionally, the scout platoon can transport the snipers forward so that they can be in position before the attack begins.

The sniper team's objective throughout an attack is to sur-

gically remove the greatest threat to the company. Usually this threat consists of enemy machineguns and antitank weapons, which the snipers, aided by their optics, can quickly identify and engage.

A threat that is often overlooked (until it is encountered) is enemy snipers. Considering that a Soviet-style motorized company has one sniper organic to each platoon, it is easy to see that there are plenty of sniper rifles in unfriendly hands throughout the world. Add to this the abundance of hunting rifles with scopes, and encountering an enemy sniper is almost inevitable.

Since mechanized infantry troops are not always protected by armor, enemy snipers will take their toll. A countersniper system is needed to eliminate this threat. A thermal sight and a 25mm cannon constitute an extremely effective countersniper system; but Bradleys are easy for snipers to detect and can be easily avoided.

The best medicine for enemy snipers is a company's organic snipers. The M24 is perfectly suited for countersniper operations due to its accurate bolt action design and large 10-power scope. Since World War I it is the skilled and patient sniper who has won countersniper battles. It is therefore essential that snipers be competently trained so they can survive and ultimately win in such an engagement.

Protecting the flank of a dismounted unit is a good economy-of-force mission for the sniper team, just as in the defense, because the sniper team has the capabilities to

detain a flanking aggressor. The same is true for the sniper team engaging small, bypassed pockets of resistance. A sniper team can be detached from its platoon and used to eliminate the remaining defenders without slowing the progress of an aggressive infantry attack.

When maneuver stops, sniper activity starts. Sniper employment against fortified positions has three major objectives:

- To demoralize the enemy between actual assaults by killing exposed enemy personnel and eliminating freedom of movement.
- To gain useful intelligence on the locations and strengths of enemy fortified positions.
- To place precision fire on fortifications in support of the assault, particularly to destroy the ability of positions to support each other.

We know from our experience in Southwest Asia that in the time it takes a mechanized force to reach the theater of operations, the enemy can construct substantial defensive positions. Thus, this type of offensive operation is extremely probable for the mechanized sniper.

Military Operations on Urban Terrain

The experiences in Panama and Southwest Asia have demonstrated that light forces need to be augmented by heavy forces that increase both combat power and their survivability.

During Operation JUST CAUSE, armored vehicles, in addition to their actual contribution to the physical damage, had a tremendous psychological effect on the Panamanian Defense Force. This indicates that a light-heavy force mix is a favorable and probable option for future conflicts of this nature. Panama serves as a model for such a conflict—a mid- to low-intensity action in a populated area where there is a limited armored threat. But, this type of war, now a reality for a mechanized force, demands finesse as well as firepower.

A 25mm cannon, although capable and useful, will usually cause collateral damage. Sniper rifles, on the other hand, provide an accurate fire capability with little chance of wounding innocent bystanders. Additionally, hostage situations are likely in populated areas. A sniper can bring such criminal activity to an abrupt halt with head shots at less than 300 meters.

In a MOUT operation, a sniper team enables a mechanized unit to become three-dimensional. With all of the heavy weapons confined on the ground with the Bradley, the sniper has the only 7.62mm precision firepower in the company that is capable of firing from such places as rooftops and windows.

By centralizing its sniper training, the battalion increases its ability to assume missions where all battalion snipers are centrally controlled. Although this method of employment is not the norm, it is valuable in special situations. (*Major Robert G. Boyko describes the demoralizing effect that centrally controlled sniper teams had on the Panamanian Defense Force in his article "JUST CAUSE: MOUT Lessons*

Learned," INFANTRY, May-June 1991, pages 28-32.)

Initiating and maintaining a sniper program in the mechanized infantry is an uphill battle. These difficulties are justified, however, because snipers provide unique and necessary capabilities, and their training produces proud, effective, and competent soldiers. And if the Army wants effective sniper teams for all of its mechanized battalions, changes need to be made.

The most important change should be to adjust the TOE to give a company dedicated snipers and their equipment. This tells the mechanized infantry commander that sniping is important and that he does not have to invent an ad hoc team to support his company.

A successful sniper program is also contingent upon trained instructors. It would be helpful to prepare a sniper instructor course to teach the battalion's NCOs and officers how to train their snipers. (The U.S. Marine Corps uses this method.)

To further facilitate quality instruction, corps level sniper schools and mobile training teams should be adopted. The AMUs have a similar configuration; adding fieldcraft instructors would not be difficult, nor would it require too much manpower. The sniper instructor course should be integrated into these schools.

The new MILES (multiple integrated laser engagement system) transmitters for the M24 must be fielded as soon as possible. With the heavy emphasis on MILES in today's Army, a weapon that cannot mount a laser transmitter is useless to a company team in the field. Because of this shortcoming, sniper teams have not been able to prove their value to much of the Army over the past 10 years.

The M49 observation scopes are also now authorized for mechanized companies. These scopes are a crucial part of a sniper's equipment, and companies need to get them as soon as possible.

Finally, sniper operations in a mechanized platoon and company should be governed by doctrine (FM 7-7J). Without this doctrinal guidance for commanders, snipers will continue to be misused or underused.

The priorities for mechanized infantry battalions are, justifiably, their armored vehicles and heavy weapon systems, and in such an environment sniper training has a low priority. But, without such a basic, centralized, training structure and a knowledge of sniper employment, a mechanized battalion's snipers will not be prepared to go to war. If they are not prepared, these battalions can only do what many others did when they deployed to Southwest Asia—leave their sniper rifles in the arms room. Commanders must realize that snipers in mechanized infantry units are too valuable to be ignored and that their employment will enhance their units' ability to close with and destroy the enemy.

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