

INFANTRY LETTERS



Putting Snipers to Better Use

Before the war in Iraq began, a lot of attention was given to tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Stealth bombers – all the high-speed 21st century weapons. But somehow, either ignored or forgotten, the highly effective sniper team was often left out of the planning stages and during operations. After serving in two different units and talking with snipers in other units, I've noticed the same problem. Many leaders may not know how to properly employ a sniper team or the capabilities a skilled sniper team offers. We can buy all the newest high-speed toys in the world, but nothing will put a bullet 1,000 meters down range into a man-sized target better than a good sniper.

When the war kicked off, there were a few units that had their sniper teams picking off bad guys and doing good things for the Army, but some still weren't being used to their fullest potential. Some people may assume that on today's modern battlefield with the JDAMs (Joint Direct Attack Munitions), Javelins, and Apache gunships, there's no use for this little guy with his little rifle. Once we started moving through the bigger towns and cities of Iraq, more precise shooting was needed. Leaders realized that they couldn't just level an apartment building that had an RPG team in it because there were also families in that same building. Or they couldn't use the coax (machine gun) on the enemy because there were too many civilians running around in front of them. Then someone finally said, "We need more snipers out here!" Only then did the demand go out for more snipers to be trained. I guess we only train them when we need them, right?

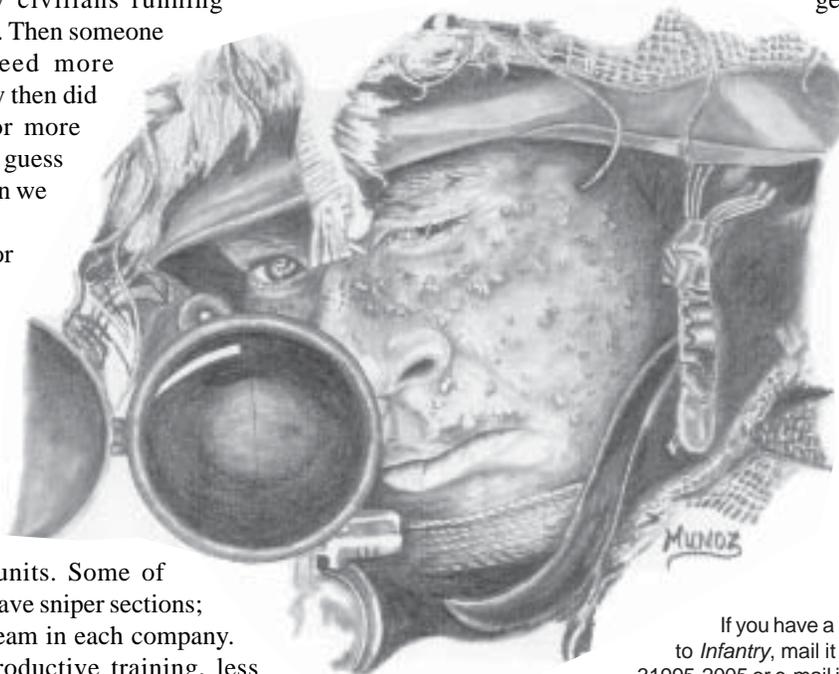
I think the remedy for this "sniper ignorance" is to have unit commanders take more interest and spend a little more time and money on their sniper sections. Most of the problems seem to be in the mechanized infantry units. Some of these units don't even have sniper sections; they have a two-man team in each company. This results in less-productive training, less

attention, little or no support, and fewer Soldiers sent to Sniper School. There are others that agree with me about having a nine to 10-man section permanently attached to a battalion's scout platoon. This way they get the attention and support they need. They will be able to train together without having to coordinate through three different chains of command. They can establish better SOPs and training plans with all qualified snipers working together. Also, being attached to the scouts will provide them with the speed, maneuverability, security, and logistical support on the battlefield. The other option would be to attach one team to each company only during field exercises, deployments, and during war. Another solution to the leadership's inexperience with snipers is to send more officers to the SEO (Sniper Employment Officer) course. That way there will be somebody in the higher chain of command that knows something about employment. I've been in six years, and I've only met one officer that has attended the course.

Another good way to learn about how to employ snipers is to just ask. Instead of telling them what you want them to do, ask them how they can best be used. Maybe he has a better idea, maybe not.

After tackling these few problems, you should have a smooth-running, highly trained, and motivated sniper section that is always geared up and ready to accomplish any mission thrown at them — be it training or war. I hope this letter will open some leader's eyes to the assets they have in their control so that they can properly use them to their advantage. In the end, it works out better for the leadership, the Soldiers, and the unit.

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