



# TSM STRYKER/BRADLEY CORNER

## Snipers in the SBCT

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*“Where precision fire is concerned, the sniper exists as the premiere and undisputed answer to the use of deadly force with the least chance of collateral damage and use of excessive force.”*

— U.S. Army Sniper School

In an operating environment like Iraq, with an insurgency aimed at disrupting stability and reconstruction operations, the ability to place precision fires on the targeted enemy and only the targeted enemy is paramount to a successful counterinsurgency fight. The sniper and his abilities are essential and critical tools that every commander must address during the planning process. The Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) is an organization that has a larger and more flexible sniper task organization than its counterparts in light or mechanized infantry units.

Photo by Mike Buytas



Appendix C of FM 3-21.2, *Stryker Brigade Combat Team Infantry Battalion*, puts the role of snipers in the SBCT into perspective:

*“Snipers play an important role in the SBCT infantry battalion. They give the commander accurate, discriminatory, long-range small-arms fire. The best use of sniper fire is against key targets that other available weapon systems may be unable to destroy due to their range, size, or location; visibility; security and stealth requirements; avoidance of collateral damage; intensity of conflict; or rules of engagement. The techniques snipers use enable them to gather detailed, critical information about the enemy as a secondary role. The effectiveness of a sniper is not measured simply by the number of casualties or destroyed targets; sniper effectiveness also includes the effect the presence of snipers has on enemy activities, morale, and decisions. The presence of snipers hinders the enemy’s movement, creates confusion and personal fear, disrupts enemy operations and preparations, and compels the enemy to divert forces to deal with the snipers.”*

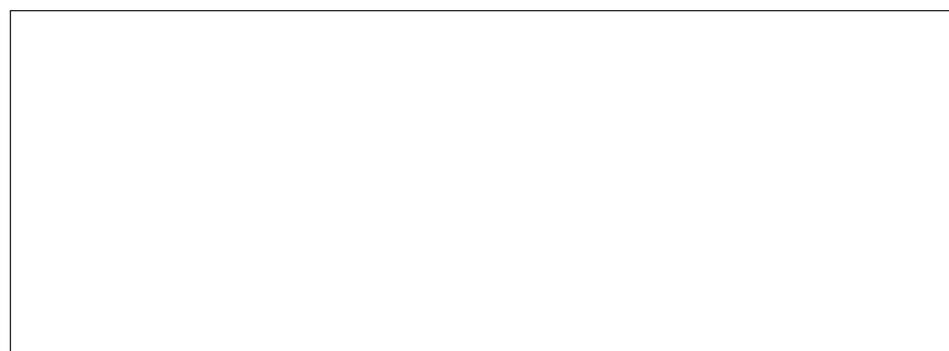
Compared to the other infantry formations in our Army today, the SBCT snipers are uniquely suited for the mission we face in our current global war on terrorism due to the significant, substantial increase in sheer numbers, and task organization within the SBCT. This is not meant to imply that the individual snipers themselves are any better than their counterparts in other battalions, only to suggest that the task organization of the SBCT supports the role of the sniper element better than previous formations.

### Task Organization

The doctrinal sniper task organization in the SBCT is a sniper squad at the battalion level and three snipers in every infantry company. That would bring the total to 48 snipers per SBCT. This is a substantial increase from other organizations. Snipers are capable of inflicting the right amount of force at the exact time and location the commander wants with minimal resources and with minimal collateral damage and negative impact upon the community we are there to protect. The battalion sniper

squad is at the disposal of the battalion commander to use with as METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time, civilians) requires. It can and often is considered a separate maneuver element. This sniper squad gives the battalion commander the capability to place precision fires on a target with minimal collateral and/or negative effects, at multiple locations throughout his battlespace. The battalion sniper squad is composed of two three-man sniper teams with a sniper squad leader. Each team is armed with an M107 sniper rifle, an M24 sniper rifle, and an M16/M203 per team. The company sniper team gives a company commander the same capability to place precision fires on a target with minimal collateral and/or negative effects as the battalion commander at a reduced scale. Company sniper teams are composed of three Soldiers: a team leader and two snipers. They are armed with an M24 sniper rifle, an M107, and M16/M203 per team. This allows the company commander the ability to task organize his sniper team appropriately based off of the mission at hand without seeking additional assets from the battalion level for precision fires.

Compared with a light/airborne/air assault infantry battalion, the additional capabilities and tools at the hands of the SBCT battalion and company commanders are striking. A light/airborne/air assault infantry battalion has six two-man sniper teams organic to the scout platoon that are used by the battalion commander as METT-TC dictates. These six two-man teams are armed with three M24 sniper rifles and three M107 sniper rifles. This is a healthy asset that has and will continue to be used effectively in our operating environments. But, this task organization is restrictive compared to the SBCT. The companies have no organic precision-fire capability, other than designated marksmen, at their disposal. The quality of designated marksmen in all units is often tempered by the equipment available, training, and commander's focus on precision-fire training. A mechanized infantry battalion's precision capability is even more restricted. By task organization, the mechanized infantry battalion has two snipers per rifle company, each armed with an M107 sniper rifle and an M24 sniper rifle. The battalions



**Figure 1 — Battalion Sniper Squad**

also utilize squad designated marksmen. Recognizing the need for precision fires in our current operating environment in Iraq, some mechanized infantry battalions have consolidated their snipers at the battalion level, somewhat mirroring the SBCT doctrinal task organization. But this comes at the expense of the company commanders in terms of boots on the ground. It is an investment that is usually profitable, increasing the flexibility and capability of the battalion commanders. Compare this to the SBCT, which has the precision-fire capability organic to the battalion and company levels with the flexibility to “surge” precision-fire capabilities at the company or even platoon level when the need is identified for specific operations. Of course, the ability to surge assets to one company is not unique to the SBCT, and the need to do so may be less often exercised due to the multitude of precision-fire capabilities organic at the battalion and company levels in the SBCT. In turn, it also does not deny the other units within the battalion the precision-fire capability that is often the best answer in a counterinsurgency fight.

Even though sniper teams avoid contact until they have identified their targets and involvement in sustained close combat is not the optimal employment of sniper teams, the enemy and circumstances in combat often change that equation, and the sniper teams themselves have little say so in the matter. One of the unique elements of the SBCT sniper capability is that in lieu of the traditional two-man teams, an additional Soldier has been added as a security man. This is an improvement over past sniper team organizations in that it gives the sniper team additional organic security without having to rely on additional assets from the parent

**Figure 2 — Company Sniper Team**

organization. The additional security man is a part of the sniper team and is not only able to provide security but transition to the role of sniper if the need arises. Additionally, he can assist in the transportation of what is often a heavy amount of equipment that the modern sniper needs to stay alive on the modern battlefield. The battalion sniper squad is a battalion asset to be used at the battalion commander's discretion. The emphasis placed on snipers at every level within the SBCT lends credence to the Army's evolving picture on warfare in this century. In a counterinsurgency, the need for precision fires is often greater than in the traditional fight. The need to destroy only the designated target with minimal collateral damage in a counterinsurgency fight often makes our Army's technological and heavy weapons a disadvantage.

### **Training**

Currently, the U.S. Army Sniper School has no training specific to the SBCT or any other type of unit, and rightly so. The mission of the Sniper School focuses on developing and sharpening the skills of the individual sniper. According to Sniper

School officials, SBCTs are proportionally represented in sniper classes and have in the past performed above standard during pre-train ups prior to mobile training teams (MTTs) conducted on-site by Sniper School cadre, resulting in a large number of trained Snipers within the SBCTs.

While preparing this article, I conducted interviews with two Sniper School instructors from the 2nd Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning, Ga., who have served in an SBCT as snipers in Iraq. Staff Sergeants Shannon Kay and Joseph Brown both served in Stryker units during their tours of Iraq. They both had very positive experiences as snipers in a SBCT and have a plethora of knowledge on how snipers in the SBCT operate and train. Both had very positive things to say in regards to their training at Sniper School and said the training had prepared them for what was expected from snipers in combat. Neither Soldier recommended that any “unit-specific” (such as the SBCT) training be implemented in Sniper School as it would detract from the primary mission of training snipers on the individual skills required of them. Both agreed that this would be a task better left to the unit and felt that the unit was better suited to conduct this training before and after a sniper’s graduation from the school. This is based on the premise that the unit prepares the Soldier to attend Sniper School by focusing on the basics of being a sniper and what is required to complete the training. Sniper School then gives the sniper the foundation. After graduating from Sniper School, the unit then capitalizes on the basic groundwork ingrained and focuses its training depending on the type of organization. From their combat experience, both SSGs Kay and Brown agreed that other than marksmanship skills, target detection is probably the single most important skill learned in Sniper School. Often, a sniper’s job is 90-percent observation and reporting and at best, 10-percent actual engagement. Other instruction that the two NCOs found extremely useful included: pistol training, urban operations training, and unorthodox and/or offhand shooting exercises.

Home station training focused largely around marksmanship skills, demolition classes and breach exercises, infiltration and exfiltration exercises as well as developing rapport with the rest of the company at the company level and with the line companies for the battalion sniper squad. In hindsight, both agreed that room clearing was a skill that the sniper teams needed to hone and become proficient at prior to deployment. As experienced NCOs, both were proficient and comfortable with room clearing drills with a squad, but clearing a room with a sniper team, with reduced combat power and direct fire assets, was something new. No team was ever committed to any openly hostile building where they had received direct fire and were required to clear the enemy and establish a hide, but as all good Soldiers know, prior to establishment of a position, in this case a hide site, the area must be cleared. While overtly clearing a building with a four-man stack from a platoon is one thing, clearing a building covertly, with a three-man sniper team with pistols and bolt action rifles, is quite another.

One area of particular concern in the sphere of training and task organization is the snipers at the company level. While the command relationship and employment of the snipers at the

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battalion and company levels was a positive atmosphere, the levels of training varied. This is probably due to the fact that there are only three snipers at the company level, and although they are desperately needed and a valued asset, the commander’s focus and priority for training is to the bulk of his company. While having a sniper team organic at the company level in combat and training gives the company commander a degree of flexibility and options that are needed in the counterinsurgency fight, the method of training them at home station prior to deployment becomes difficult. It may be better to have all snipers in the battalion at the battalion level, effectively having two sniper squads. This would allow the battalion commander to ensure quality control and a common baseline for training for all sniper teams throughout the battalion. The sniper teams in the second squad could be habitually assigned to the same company on training exercises to develop the rapport necessary for proper support and employment. Once a deployment order is received, the operational control of the snipers could then be given to their respective companies. This would allow the company commander to inherit a trained sniper team that he and his subordinates have developed a relationship and rapport with, without losing any capabilities organic to the SBCT, and allow him to focus on the majority of his combat power. This would also allow the battalion commander to ensure that all of his sniper teams are trained to a common standard, have comparable skills, and would ease training as far as ranges, etc.

### **Sniper Employment Officer**

The issue of “who is the Sniper Employment Officer or SEO” at both the battalion and company levels is often overlooked and sometimes not even addressed. This is a critical issue to ensure that the commander gets the most out of all his assets. During the military decision-making process (MDMP), both at the battalion and company levels, all units are represented with what they can bring to the fight. To ensure that the snipers at all levels are employed in accordance with the commander’s intent and properly within their capabilities, it is paramount that they are represented in the MDMP process. The sniper squad leader usually was present at the battalion level and served as the S-3’s “go to” guy for all sniper-related issues as far as employment, capabilities, etc. He was also the person that did not let the S-3 forget about the sniper assets available to the battalion when the S-3 was focusing on the bigger moving pieces and mechanics involved in a battalion fight.

At the company level, it usually fell upon the executive officer (XO) to act as the company SEO. This was not by design, but worked out extremely well when looking at the SBCT company task organization. No vehicle is specifically designated as the “mover” of the sniper team. A Stryker Mortar Carrier Vehicle

(MCV) or Fire Support Vehicle (FSV) were usually designated to carry the sniper team on administrative moves. Often attached to platoons for operations, the snipers would do as snipers in all organizations have done in the past and make themselves part of the platoon for the insertion in their vehicles. When conducting infiltrations separate or independent from a platoon or the rest of the company, the XO used either the MCV or the FSV to insert the teams. This worked out well, gave the sniper team independent support without hindering or reducing the combat power of the platoons, and allowed the commander visibility of the sniper team at all times through the XO.

### Intelligence and Equipment Support

The available intelligence assets organic to the SBCT battalion are fairly robust compared to that of their counterparts in the heavy and light battalions. This allows the intelligence officer the ability to develop very good target folders and “real time” imagery and video to assist the snipers in mission planning and hide site selection. Both SSGs Kay and Brown reported regularly receiving target folders and products from the S-2 that enhanced their capabilities to plan and determine the feasibility of a mission. Of course, extensive planning on a battlefield such as Iraq was not always a luxury snipers had, and they often had to operate off of verbal orders via FM radio. They were, however, still able to get “real-time” intelligence updates from the S-2 from the assets available, which were fed to them as situations developed.

While the snipers in an SBCT are not equipped with any more or less special equipment than snipers in any other unit, their observations on some of the equipment deserve noting.

1. The Stryker vehicle itself is an excellent insertion/extraction vehicle due to its high speed, low or subdued noise signature, and agility. Deception operations are a viable insertion technique, and the Stryker’s reduced noise signature can easily

Photo by Staff Sergeant Kevin L. Moses

*A Soldier with the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment provides security during a mission in Iraq.*

capitalize on the observation mission of the snipers. This allows a unit to investigate what the sniper observes when deadly force is not desired or when they do not want to compromise their position, without the observed target receiving early warning (due to noise) of their approach.

2. The PVS 10 scope is a good piece of equipment but rather fragile, and repairs in country were difficult.

3. The AN/PRC 148 radio is an excellent piece of equipment that needs to be standard equipment for all sniper teams.

4. Suppressors for sniper weapons are a must. They reduce a sniper’s signature and reduce the chances of compromise once an engagement is initiated, therefore increasing survivability and reducing the possibility of having to conduct a displacement once an engagement is initiated.

5. In an SBCT, the M107 rifle’s role is limited in its employment due to the phenomenal ability of the Remote Weapon System (RWS) in the Stryker. This lends validity to the “arms room” concept of the sniper in the SBCT. The trained sniper knows best the weapon of choice for the mission at hand.

The SBCT is a unique organization in our Army today. It has organic assets specially suited for the counterinsurgency fight. The number of precision-fire assets available to the maneuver commander is unprecedented. The flexibility of having numerous precision fire teams afford the SBCT commander the ability and flexibility to not only kill the enemy, but ensure that only the enemy is killed, preserving the precious, carefully cultivated relationships developed with our Iraqi partners.

*“Untutored courage is useless in the face of educated bullets.”*

**— General George Patton**

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