

# SMALL UNIT LEADER DM NOTES

LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAVID LIWANAG

## Mission of the Squad Designated Marksman (SDM)

*“The primary mission of the SDM is to deploy as a member of the rifle squad. The SDM is a vital member of his individual squad and not a squad sniper. He fires and maneuvers with his squad and performs all duties of the standard rifleman. The SDM has neither the equipment nor training to operate individually or in a small team to engage targets at extended ranges with precision fires.*

*“The secondary mission of the SDM is to engage key targets from 300 to 500 meters with effective, well-aimed fires using the standard weapon system and standard ammunition. He may or may not be equipped with an optic. The SDM must, therefore, possess a thorough understanding and mastery of the fundamentals of rifle marksmanship as well as ballistics, elevation and windage hold-off, sight manipulation, and range estimation.”*

— FM 3-22.9, Rifle Marksmanship M16A1, M16A2/3, M16A4, and M4 carbine

By definition the squad designated marksman (DM) is a sharpshooter at the maneuver foot-soldier level. It is NOT another dismounted soldier role, but rather a well-developed organic, assigned rifleman skill.

The DM provides discriminating, on-command organic precision direct fire support to fire team, squad, section, and platoon leaders. DMs extend the “Reach”

of small unit leaders to cover and dominate key terrain and avenues of approach from 200-300 yards to 300-500 yards. DMs provide short-range counter-sniper fire capability in cities and built-up urban areas.

In the movie *Saving Private*

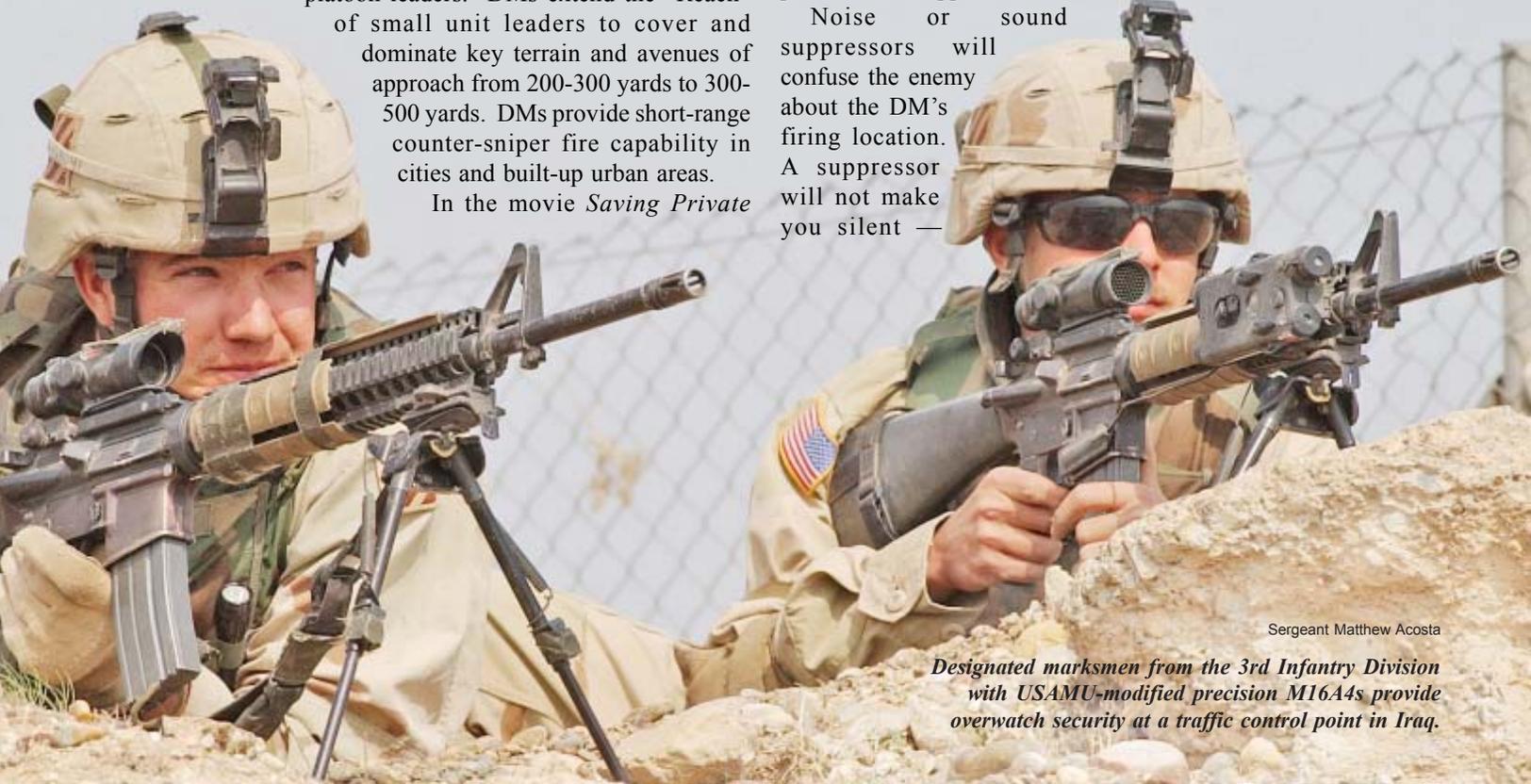
*Ryan*, actor Barry Pepper portrays Private Daniel Jackson, a marksman who provides long-range observation and precision rifle fire (historically, the 1942 US Army infantry squad was organized around Soldiers armed with M1 rifles, Browning automatic rifles, and a single M1903 Springfield rifle with telescopic sight).

DMs in mounted convoy security and escort vehicles give precision fire coverage with lower risk of collateral damage than from machine guns and Mk-19s.

Precision fires are highly coveted in urban and built-up areas in “The 3-Block War.” The small-unit leader always uses METT-TC to best place his direct-fire assets. The DM’s ability to shoot well gives the leader flexibility when planning movement to contact or retrograde. Overwatch elements can immediately destroy or suppress enemy troops in suspected or known enemy positions during bounds and provide support fire when machineguns displace. DMs in raids and deliberate ambush support elements naturally weigh in with precision direct and suppressive fire in base-of-fire teams. In the security element they seal off the objective area by fire.

While a 25-meter offset zero is good to generally align a sight to a rifle, there is no replacement for a true point-of-aim/point-of-impact zero confirmed on a 300-meter KD or steel target range. DMs with night vision devices, scopes, and properly-zeroed AN/PEQ-2 or PAQ-4 infrared target illuminators and aimers provide round-the-clock precision fire support.

Noise or sound suppressors will confuse the enemy about the DM’s firing location. A suppressor will not make you silent —



Sergeant Matthew Acosta

*Designated marksmen from the 3rd Infantry Division with USAMU-modified precision M16A4s provide overwatch security at a traffic control point in Iraq.*

but at night or in town it can make you virtually undetectable.

M995 5.56mm armor piercing ammunition is extremely accurate from the M16 and M4, usually shooting 300-meter ten shot groups half the size of M855 "Green Tip" ball. The M995 bullet weighs the same as an M16A1 bullet (55 grains vice 62 grains for M16A2 Ball) and it flies faster and flatter so zeros are different.

Media coverage (and the ability to post digital video almost immediately to the Internet) sensitizes leaders to Law of Land Warfare restraints. The principle of proportionality prohibits "indiscriminate attacks" which cause incidental damage to civilians, or damage to civilian objects and property "Excessive in relation to concrete and direct military advantage." When DMs are properly equipped with optics, they can distinguish armed combatants from noncombatants and minimize collateral damage with precision snapshots in areas where targets are fleeting and only briefly exposed.

The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory has conducted both urban combat and designated marksman field experiments. Eight Marines from the Marine Corps Security Force Designated Marksman School attempted to positively identify 132 role-playing targets in various uniforms and with various weapons systems (totaling 1,056 target identification attempts) at ranges from 100 to 700 yards. The DMs attempted to acquire and identify targets with no optic; with the 4-power Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG); and a variable-power telescope at 3, 6, and 8 power. These are some of their consolidated findings:

- 1) Marines without optics had more difficulty correctly identifying targets than those DMs with optics;
- 2) Marines without optics could not identify targets more than 50 percent of the time after 100 yards;
- 3) At longer ranges shooters identified more targets correctly at 8 power magnification than with lower magnification;
- 4) At shorter ranges it took less time to correctly identify targets as optic magnification increased;
- 5) DMs will experience eyestrain if they are constantly in "scan" or "observe" mode in their optics;

6) If the DM is the only man with optics, some leaders will run him ragged scoping out all suspicious or suspected enemy positions.

Precision M16 fire at longer ranges (300-500 meters) is not magic, but it is a high demand/low density skill. Leaders should screen their riflemen to find who may be a naturally gifted or trained shot. Precision M16 marksmen come from a variety of backgrounds:

- 1) There are rare, naturally gifted shooters;
- 2) Some Soldiers will come from rural backgrounds or with hunting experience, again leaders may have a few within their ranks;
- 3) Some Soldiers will have a competition shooting background with air rifles or .22s. How can small unit leaders develop DMs?
  - 1) Establish local training courses.
  - 2) Send Soldiers to compete with their rifles. Military and civilian shooting championships are held around the country, many locally or on Army and National Guard posts and camps. NRA and Civilian Marksmanship Program clubs host regular M16 highpower service rifle competitions (usually from March through November), matches, clinics, and practices.

3) Request train-the-trainer missions from the Army Marksmanship Unit, Infantry School, National Guard Marksmanship Unit, respective National Guard State Marksmanship Coordinators, or the Army Reserve Small Arms Group.

4) Request courses from the Director of Civilian Marksmanship.

How can small unit leaders train and sustain their DMs once deployed? While field-fire ranges with steel silhouette "Iron maiden" targets are the most time and manpower efficient, leaders can make ad hoc Known Distance ranges by surveying a range and laying out firing berms; digging trenches ("Pits") or building protected/raised earth target berms or earth-filled HESCO barriers; and stapling cardboard E-type silhouettes to 2 x 4s to raise and lower targets from behind protection. Shot holes are marked in the silhouettes using standard target markers and spindles.

The designated marksman is NOT a sniper in the classic sense, but a line rifleman with highly developed and practiced shooting and

observation skills. He is immediately responsive to the small unit's leader for precision direct fire. ALL Soldiers can develop into trained shooters.

## **CONTACTS FOR TRAINING & MATERIALS:**

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U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit  
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Fort Benning, GA 31905

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C Company, 2nd Bn., 29th Inf.  
US Army Infantry School  
Fort Benning, GA 31905

Commander  
NG Marksmanship Training Center  
Camp Joseph T. Robinson  
North Little Rock, AR 72199

Commander  
U.S. Army Reserve Small Arms  
Readiness Group  
4950 South 2nd Street  
Bldg. 307A Fort Gillem  
Forest Park, GA 30297

Commander  
Weapons Training Battalion  
Marine Corps Combat Dev. Command  
27211 Garand Road  
Quantico, VA 22134

Director of Civilian Marksmanship  
Civilian Marksmanship Program  
P.O. Box 576  
Port Clinton, OH 43452

Center for Army Lessons Learned  
LTC (Ret) Scott Blaney  
10 Meade Ave (Bldg 50)  
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1350

<https://call2.army.mil/focus/sniper/SDMMaterials.asp> (CAC required)

NRA Competition Shooting Division  
11250 Waples Mill Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22030

**Lieutenant Colonel David Liwanag** commanded the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, from June 2003 until June 2006. He is currently assigned to the J3, Special Operations Command - Joint Forces Command at Norfolk, Virginia. Other previous assignments include commanding the U.S. Army Parachute Team and serving with the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.