

# The Tale of Two Disciplines (Military vs. Police Sniping)

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In recent years snipers and sniping have gained unparalleled notoriety from virtually all forms of the media. Today amongst professional services snipers and sniping are emerging as a viable if not necessary tactical option in military and law enforcement roles. Due to this situation, amateurs and professionals alike have come forward to learn, teach, comment and complain. It would seem that finally the art of sniping is beginning to be regarded as the serious discipline that it is.

Because the military and police (read law enforcement) are the only organizations that use snipers in an official capacity they of course are looked upon for subject matter expertise. Currently there are numerous books, magazines, videos and actual courses or schools dedicated to one or both of these institutions which many of you readers have patronized. However, a residual effect of this “coming of age” is the vocal and written separation or class distinction between these two organizations. Within the industry there are several writers and instructors who are now beginning to advocate either side over the other.

Being a military sniper myself, I of course and predisposed to the military side of the house. However, because I have had the opportunity to train and interact with police snipers in addition to some unique assignments I believe that I comment on this issue.

There are volumes of material currently available on the subject of sniping however, little of it specifically addresses the similarities and differences between military and police sniping. The fact is that police sniping would not exist without military snipers and the contributions to the art that have resulted due to the combat needs of the military. Let’s take a look at the differences of the two.

DIFFERENCES	MILITARY	POLICE
<b>Training</b>	Initially at a minimum 2 weeks (can be as long as 8 weeks) in duration. If a dedicated sniper will train approx. 1 week per month on marksmanship skills. Field craft training will be conducted during missions at least on a quarterly basis.	Possibly no formal training. If lucky will be allowed to train 1 paid weekend per month. Additional training will usually be in a lecture format. Normally minimal if any field skill training.
<b>Employment</b>	Normally employed as a 2-man team as a part of a larger effort using multiple sniper teams. May have a security element of up to 6 personnel. Employment will be the result of thorough mission planning by the team and several levels of command above.	Usually employed singly and as the only sniper on the scene. Will normally have to provide own security. Employment will be a result of a crisis. Minimal if any planning will be conducted. Sniper is depended upon to self deploy and conduct operations IAW department policy.



<b>DIFFERENCES</b>	<b>MILITARY</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Duties</b>	Broad range of duties possible. Normally sniper team will be tasked to collect intelligence as the primary mission. Special Operations snipers may be tasked with confirm or deny the presence of either friendly or enemy personnel. Surgical fire power a secondary mission and done in support of a larger effort. May be tasked with denial of terrain through harassing fire. Sniper team/s may operate freely in an area of responsibility.	Normal duty will be to provide intelligence to command and control (C2) to enhance decision-making process. First priority will be to establish location and disposition of non-threat and threat personnel. May be tasked to support assault operations. Department policy will dictate level of freedom during incident however, C2 element may retain final authority to engage regardless of situation. Primarily responsibility to protect citizens, other officers and self.
<b>Rules of Engagement</b>	Right to self defense and defense of fellow soldiers never removed. Targets will be identified by appearance and actions (weapons, combative). In Special Operations targets may be engaged at specific times only. Normally any threat to other friendly forces or self is a justifiable target.	Normally will maintain the right to self defense however, this may not include lethal response. ROE may change from incident to incident. Even a threat may not be a justifiable target depending on situation. Politics verses tactical reasoning will drive formation of ROE. Targets may never be confirmed.
<b>Duration of Missions</b>	Usually will last up to 3-5 days. May be resupplied during mission to facilitate continued operations. Upon conclusion of mission sniper teams will normally be withdrawn to safe area to rest and refit. May be tasked for back to back missions with minimal turn around time.	Sniper must be capable to employ at all times. Normally will last hours verses days. Upon conclusion of incident the officer may have to return to normal patrol duties.
<b>Support</b>	Extensive support base. Can request a wide variety of support depending on mission profile. If the mission is protracted the sniper team may be replaced with a fresh team to continue operations. Ability to replace broken or non-functional equipment.	Minimal if any support during mission. May have to self deploy requiring individual preparedness. Cannot count on relief during mission regardless of duration. Minimal possibility of replacing equipment.
<b>Environment</b>	Training focuses on rural employment. Predominately operates in rural terrain although may be used in urban areas during Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT). Special Operations snipers train in both environments and may specialize in predominate terrain of Area of Responsibility.	Training focuses on urban employment. Predominate area of operations depends on department location.



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<p><b>Command and Control (C2)</b></p>	<p>Established chain of command. Policies and procedures will known and practiced. Capability of instantaneous communication between snipers and C2.</p>	<p>C2 may change from incident to incident. Sniper may report to C2 who have never worked with snipers previously. Likely C2 untrained in sniper operations. Perception of sniper capabilities may dominate decision-making process.</p>

<b>SIMILARITIES</b>	<b>MILITARY</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<p><b>Dedication</b>                      Snipers must attain and maintain a level of training that normal individuals within their career field do not. Normally this will result in extensive personal actions.</p>	<p>There are 2 types of snipers in the military, conventional and Special Operations. Both require a vast amount of personal initiative. In either case the sniper normally was selected to attend sniper school due to his displayed actions. Most military snipers purchase large amounts of support equipment that the military does not have to better accomplish their mission. Most military snipers spend much of their own personal time working on some aspect of sniping.</p>	<p>Police snipers are usually officers who have sought out the extra training, duty and responsibilities of a sniper. In many cases police snipers purchase their own equipment and train on their own time and expense. The dedication level of police snipers is usually extremely high due primarily of the fact that sniping is a secondarily duty.</p>
<p><b>Base Attributes</b>                      Regardless of the organization, the sniper must possess certain attributes such as maturity, intelligence, physical fitness, excellent health, and even temperament.</p>	<p>Sniper students are volunteers who are usually selected by a "Order of Merit List" or OML that is derived by time in the unit, past experience and leadership recommendation. Once selected for attendance to school, the sniper student must pass numerous "gates" to make graduation. Normally sniper instructors will remove any student who displays attributes not desirable as a sniper.</p>	<p>In most departments, snipers are volunteers who knowingly and willingly accept the additional load of this task. Officers who are questionable may be advised or banned by their department for attendance to school or conducting sniper duties. Without department sponsorship police officers would find it extremely difficult to conduct any type of sniper activities.</p>
<p><b>Base Equipment</b>                      Of course the Sniper Weapon System is the core of the equipment list, however the sniper requires numerous pieces of equipment to be successful.</p>	<p>Sniper Weapon System (US Army = M24, USMC = M40A1). Spotting scope (M49 or equivalent). Radio systems (PRC-119 FM). All snipers have issued field equipment, however most purchase their own and modify it to meet the needs of the job and personal preference.</p>	<p>Sniper Weapon System (varies greatly but generally world class systems). Spotting scope (varies greatly). Radio systems (Department Standard). Depending on the area of assignment, police snipers will purchase equipment to meet the needs of the job. The department may issue some equipment if common to all or a specialty item.</p>

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<p><b>Base Skills</b>            All snipers must possess a high degree of skill in advanced rifle marksmanship, sniper marksmanship, estimating range, observation of ground, camouflage, and sniper movement.</p>	<p>All snipers undergo initial training in the base skills of sniping. Depending the course, certain skills are stressed over others. During assignment as a sniper the shooter will continue training in these base skills as required.</p>	<p>If the officer attends a formal course he will be trained in the base skills at a minimum. During his training (personal or sponsored) the officer will maintain these skills as required.</p>
<p><b>Accuracy Levels</b>            Every sniper needs to be able to attain a high level of accuracy. This accuracy level is the MAXIMUM that he can with the weapon system, ammunition and his skill will allow.</p>	<p>Although conventional snipers may engage opportunity targets, his survival depends on his ability to do so in the minimum number of rounds. At targets under 400 meters the sniper must be capable of hitting consistent head shot sized targets because of the small arms threat and because his targets are usually those personnel who can effect him the quickest (leaders, machniegunners, mortar-men, etc).</p>	<p>When the police sniper must fire it will normally be to end a situation that is about to go very bad. The sniper must be able to engage head-sized targets out to 200 yards consistently.</p>

As you can see the attributes that make a sniper are shared by both organizations. The point that I am making here is that regardless of whom you work for, the skills and attributes necessary to do the job are the same.

I have read in numerous publications that “Police snipers must attain a higher level of accuracy than military snipers” followed by a laundry list of reasons. This is just not true. While it is true that the military sniper can obtain mission success in certain situations by merely inflicting injury rather than death upon the enemy, he still must be capable of the pin point accuracy needed in high risk situations. The one thing that many law enforcement supporters fail to take into account is that military snipers are used in a much broader range of mission profiles than police snipers. A military sniper (depending on his unit) could find himself in a mission in the desert supporting an all out general war offensive followed shortly by being employed to provide pin point accuracy onto security positions in support of an Direct Action assault.

Today’s political climate is one of uncertainty. Military personnel in general are finding themselves in situations that 10 years ago would have seemed unimaginable. Peace keeping, peace enforcement, non-combatant evacuation, humanitarian relief and/or assistance, etc. are all missions that until recent times were not the forte of conventional US forces. Sure the US has always conducted similar operations but in past times these missions were dealt with in terms that soldiers, sailors and Marines could understand. The fact is that until the present regime, special operations were basically left to special operations forces. Today a soldier from any conventional unit can find himself involved in operations that far exceed his training.

To bring this article to a close I would like to state for the record that as far as I am concerned both military and police snipers are cut from the same cloth. Military snipers enjoy an established support and training base that does nor normally exist in the civilian sector which is why federal law enforcement agencies turn to the military for training and facilities. However, police snipers enjoy a more stream lined mission profile and familiarity of the area of responsibility. A police sniper however is generally as good as he wishes to be verses a military sniper who is forced to train and either improve or be removed from those duties.

As the saying goes “Can’t we all just get along?”

***De Oppresso Liber***