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**THE URBAN AREA DURING SUPPORT MISSIONS**  
**CASE STUDY: MOGADISHU**  
**The Tactical Level II: The Offensive and Defensive Use**  
**of Urban Snipers**  
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Five Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (Fast) platoons ultimately deployed to Somalia. Ours, 5th Platoon, was the second of the five sent to support the U.S. diplomatic mission in that nation.

### *Fast Platoon Organization*

- HQ: Plt Cmdr-Capt
  - Plt Sgt-SSgt
  - Plt Guide-Sgt
  - Plt RTO-Cpl
  - Corpsman-HM2
- Sqds-3 x 13
- Sniper Tms-4 x 2
- Total Plt = 52

The platoon's organization is based on a basic marine rifle platoon. This platoon has enhanced skills and weaponry. It can be task organized and equipped to meet specific mission requirements.

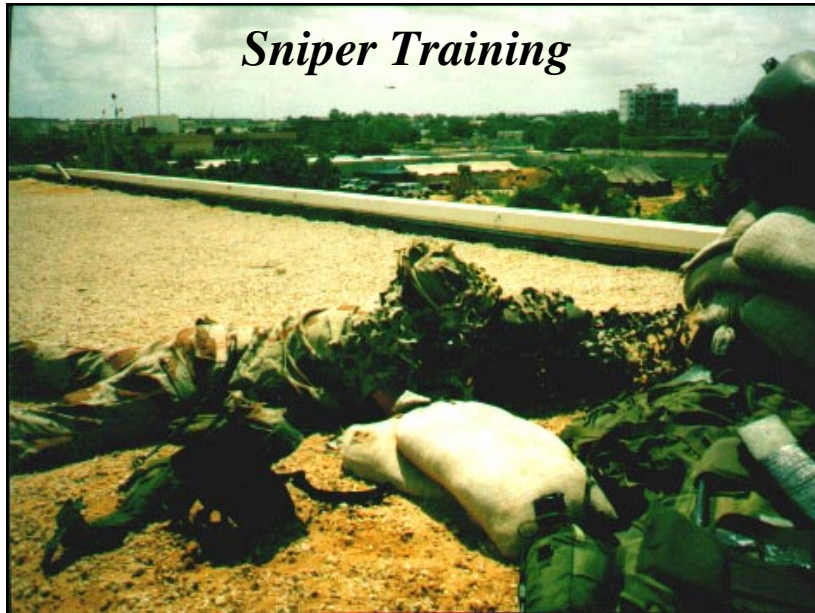


This photo was taken in the U.S ambassador's residence in Mogadishu. Snipers employed bed sheets to allow them to blend in with the surrounding walls.

## *Sniper Weapons and Equipment*

- 4 x M49 Spotting Scopes
- 4 x M14 DM Weapons (7.62 mm)
- 4 x M40 Sniper Rifles (7.62 mm)
- 4 x M16 H-Bar Rifles (5.56 mm)
- 4 x M16A2 Rifles (5.56 mm)
- 8 x M9 Pistols (9 mm)
- 4 x AN/PVS-4 Night Vision Scopes
- 4 x SIMRADs Night Vision Scopes

The sniper section had a wide variety of weapons available for employment. The M-40s and M-14s worked very well for daylight operations but the SIMRAD scopes were problematic at night. Humidity caused the scopes to fog up on a regular basis and limited the sniper's ability to engage targets at night. The H-BAR M-16s with ANPVS-4 scopes proved more capable. Permanently mounting the scopes on the H-BARs gave us a reliable night sniping capability.



This was a sniper position on the roof of the U.S. ambassador's residence.

## *Sniper Training*

- Phase I : Individual training
  - Sniper School, Quantico, Va
  - Division Sniper School, CLNC
- Phase II : Section training
  - Scenario training
  - Sustainment training
- Phase III : Platoon integrated training
  - Security Operations/Escort Operations
  - Recovery Operations

Snipers conducted their training in phases. Upon completion of the basic schooling the section began scenario-based training. This training consisted of both urban and rural operations and included defensive as well as offensive conditions. Scenario-based training utilized shoot/do not shoot situations. Sustainment training consisted of firing on known distance ranges up to 700 yards at least twice a month. During platoon integrated training, a considerable amount of time was spent on recovery/target-specific training in support of an assault element seizing an objective. The sniper section was also trained in sketching, range card development, and the use of supporting arms.

## *Mission*

- Conduct compound and mobile security to defend State Department and other associated personnel IOT provide a safe environment for the conduct of diplomatic operations.

This was our mission statement as I remember it. Our deployment order originated at the JCS and assigned us to CINCCENT. We were under the operational control of the U.S. diplomatic mission. Our day-to-day orders were driven by the ambassador or the senior Diplomatic Security Officer.

### *Tasks (Specified)*

- Provide security for both the embassy and housing compounds.
- Provide mobile security for helicopter and motorcade movements.
- Conduct other tasks as directed by the ambassador or the head of the diplomatic security detachment.

The tasks were in keeping with our training and capabilities. The greatest limitation to providing proper security was our inability to patrol outside of our defensive positions. This prohibition, combined with no indirect fire capability, limited our ability to counter potential threats. Although the lack of indirect fire assets was a problem, it did make sense in light of the urban environment and ROE. Helicopters were made available during escort missions for use as transportation and emergency fire support.



### *Tasks (Implied)*

- Provide support to United Nations forces within the scope of capabilities and area of influence.
- Deter hostile action.

Note: No offensive taskers

There were no offensive taskers. The majority of our engagements were in support of U.S. or UN forces.



This sniper hide was constructed using white mesh. The mesh was very effective in hiding teams from observation. The teams were virtually invisible from the street below. The mesh in no way hindered the teams ability to observe or engage hostile targets.

## *Rules of Engagement*

- Required positive identification of militiamen/clan members in the act of committing aggressive/hostile action IOT allow for friendly/UN forces to engage/apply deadly force.

The ROE were not a major problem. The biggest problem was how the marines applied the ROE and what they understood them to mean. Aggressive or hostile action can be different things to different men. Initiating an engagement initially required my or the platoon sergeant's authorization. As the marines became more familiar with the ROE and how they were to be applied, we were able to allow them to engage on their own initiative. At no time was the validity of any engagement questioned by the UN or the diplomatic staff. The snipers exercised considerable discipline in the use of force and did not engage on several occasions when they could have.



This photo shows two sniper teams developing sketches and range cards.

## *Sniper Operations (Phases)*

- July-August: Reactive, deployed teams in response to hostile action.
  - Developed detailed range cards, identified sectors and “coded” associated buildings.
  - Tracked movement of personnel in our area of influence and identified dead space.
- Sept-Oct: Proactive, aggressively employed snipers to deter and eliminate hostile action.

During the early stages of the deployment the snipers were reactive. We underwent a learning phase during which the marines became more comfortable with the ROE and began developing ideas on how they could be employed more effectively. Initially, hostile action was limited. This period allowed the men to familiarize themselves with their environment and construct their positions. As hostilities escalated, the teams began to understand the cycle on which the Somali gunmen worked. This cycle revolved around sleep, drug use, and certain periods during the day when the gunmen were more active. As the situation became more hostile, the snipers began engaging with more frequency and therefore were a major influence in controlling the level of hostilities on our section of the perimeter.

## *Method of Employment*

- Independent/section sniper operations
- In support of convoy operations
- In support of general engagements
- Limitation: Not authorized to employ snipers outside the UN/embassy compound.

The primary function of the snipers was to aid in the protection of the compounds; much of their work to this end was independent of the daily guard routine. Including the snipers in convoy operations was essential. Although their value was limited during movements, they were invaluable in supporting security operations once the convoy arrived at their destination. Because we routinely visited the same locations, we were able to develop detailed sketches of most sites and determine the best places to employ available assets. The snipers were not employed in hides when supporting general engagements. We learned early that firing more than one shot from a hide compromised that position and generally drew enemy fire. By employing them from positions with other marines we were able to engage more than once if the situation required. Employing sniper positions outside the compound was not an option due to our mission. The nature of the environment was not conducive to clandestine sniper operations.



## *Independent/Section Sniper Operations*

- Issued section sniper order that was modified as the situation changed.
- Conducted sniper operations within sectors to deter and eliminate hostile acts.
- Coordinated with UN forces to employ snipers within their sectors.
- Identified and prepared hides.

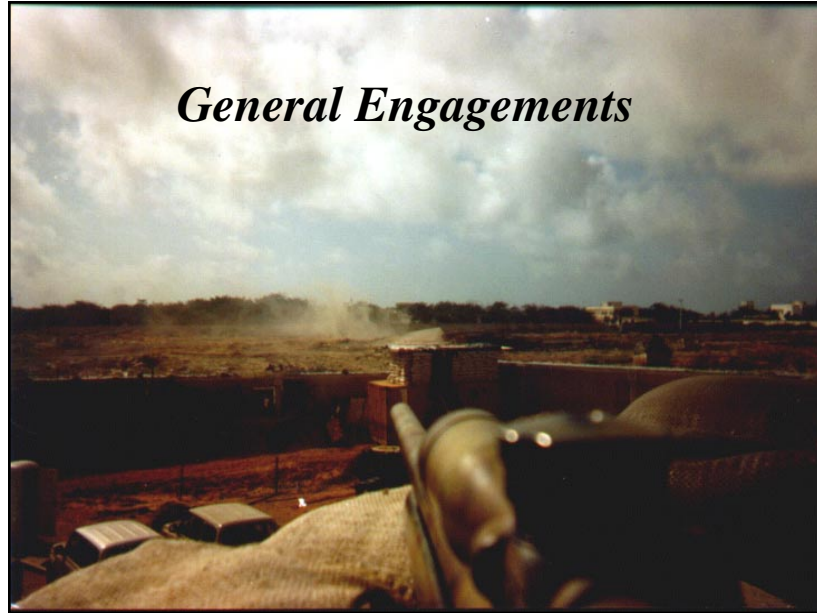
The initial order that was given to the sniper section required frequent modification as the situation changed. We modified our operations as we refined methods of employment. Because of the fixed nature of our positions, we had a limited number of areas that were suitable for the construction of hides. Periodically we overtly employed snipers to act as a deterrent. In addition, we constructed dummy positions and moved personnel to give the appearance of a more robust sniper capability. Coordination with UN forces inside the old embassy allowed our teams to occupy positions that supported the embassy and housing compounds but did not expose the teams to threats outside the main UN perimeter.



## *Convoy Operations*

- Location within convoy
- Site review/plan for employment at final destination
- Assignment of sectors of fire/observation

As discussed earlier, at least one sniper team accompanied all convoys. The snipers generally occupied a seat in the last vehicle in the convoy. Based on the nature of the threat and our experiences with being ambushed, we learned that the Somalis generally engaged the lead vehicle first. Having the snipers at the back of the convoy would often give them the opportunity to dismount and engage. In general, however, our convoy SOP was to not stop the convoy if ambushed but to drive through and out of the kill zone.



## *General Engagements*

- Not employed in hides
- No limitations on number of engagements
- Employed to cover avenues of ingress/egress and isolate or limit flow of forces in our area of influence
- Attempted to add depth to engagement area

An additional reason for employing the snipers with the other marines during general engagements was we were able to position the teams in areas that allowed them to observe and engage targets at greater ranges. The majority of the sniper engagements were at a distance of 200-300 meters. By positioning teams so that they could see down avenues of approach, we could better assess the flow of hostile forces into our area of influence and add depth to the engagement area. We saw that employing them in this fashion, although overt, allowed the teams to act as combat multipliers much like artillery and mortars by limiting the enemy's ability to move men around the engagement area.

### *Basic Rules of Employment*

- One shot engagements (protect limited hides)
- No discussion of engagements on radio
- Immediate debrief/critique
- Two hour time limit in hides
- **STAY WITHIN ROE. IF IN DOUBT, DO NOT SHOOT.**

## *Problem Areas*

- Night Optics
  - SIMRAD vs AN/PVS-4
- Intelligence
  - Intelligence geared towards the capture of Aided, not towards compound security or convoy operations
- ROE
  - Countering hostile reconnaissance effort
  - Enemy use of civilian populace.

Difficulties with night optics have been discussed. Intelligence was not geared toward convoy operations or base defense. Although many requests were submitted for information support, the intel community was focused on gathering information that would aid in capturing Aided. Basic information concerning times and locations of enemy activity were not forthcoming. We developed our own event matrix that depicted the times of day that had more significant enemy activity. In addition, we were able to map the locations of all incidents, determine what areas were most prone to enemy activity, and identify the nature of that activity. This, combined with our ongoing observations of local activity, allowed us to employ our snipers during peak periods and become more effective. The biggest problem that we had with the ROE was our inability to engage unarmed men that were obviously conducting reconnaissance of our activity. Somali men would get on adjacent roof tops and overtly observe our positions. If armed, the situation might mature and allow for an engagement, but most often they were unarmed and we were powerless to prevent this activity. In addition, during

protests/riots near our positions, armed Somalis routinely mixed with the crowd and proved to be difficult targets to engage.

## *Lessons Learned*

- More than one shot from a hide generally compromises the hide and draws fire.
- Scenario based training vital for applying ROE.
- ROE interpretation
- Mesh screening invaluable for hide construction in buildings.
- **DO NOT MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS WITH BODY COUNT.**

Many lessons were learned from our experiences in Somalia. The most important lesson I learned was that we should not measure effectiveness with a body count. Snipers are aggressive, goal-oriented individuals. By counting kills you put the focus on the wrong goal and risk creating competition. In a restrictive urban environment we must avoid creating situations that can obscure the objective of the operation. My solution was counting all engagements as sniper section events; it was always a team effort. Although I am sure the sniper kept count, we never discussed engagements in individual terms.