

The Circuit

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The Magazine for Security Professionals



COUNTERING SNIPERS

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COUNTERING SNIPERS PART 1

By: Orlando Wilson

I am sure there are those who initially looked at the title of this article dismissed it as something that will never apply to them and that it is just fear mongering. Personally, I think the information here is applicable to everyone who is working in hostile environments or with high-risk clients. ►



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Examples of high-profile sniper shoots include:

- Zoran Đinđić, the sixth Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, was assassinated on March 12, 2003, in Belgrade, Serbia. Đinđić was shot from approximately 180 meters away, using a 7.62mm Heckler & Koch G3 rifle as he exited his vehicle outside the Serbian government headquarters. He was shot in the heart and died almost instantly, his bodyguard was also seriously wounded in the stomach by another shot.
- Kurdish crime boss Aslan Usoyan was killed in a sniper attack in central Moscow on January 16th, 2013. The assassin used a silenced 'Val' 9mm assault rifle. One of Usoyan's bodyguards reportedly returned fire with several blind shots, but the fact that it took some time for police to find shooter's position showed that the bodyguard had failed completely at locating the sniper. Usoyan was shot in the head, a woman walking near the mob boss stepped into the assassin's firing

line. According to LifeNews daily's timeline, the hitman attempted to move her by shooting her in the thigh. When she remained upright, she was shot again in the chest and fell, allowing the sniper to hit Usoyan once more as his bodyguards grouped around their wounded boss.

- Montenegrin gangster Dalibor Djuric was shot in the chest by a sniper on 22nd September 2016 while outdoors in the yard of the Spuz state prison in the Montenegrin capital Podgorica. The jailed Mafia boss of one the rival drugs clans in the resort of Kotor was shot dead in prison while serving a two-year sentence for extortion. Police blocked the streets surrounding the Spuz prison to try to locate the assassin, but only found a car set on fire near the prison.
- Nicola Rizzuto was killed on November 10, 2010, he was the leader of the Sicilian faction of the Rizzuto crime family in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Rizzuto was killed at his home when a single

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bullet from a sniper's rifle which went through two layers of glass in the rear patio doors, the gunman was hiding in the woods outside the mafia boss's Montreal house.

Three of the above assassinations were of Mafia bosses, and I am sure there are plenty of you wondering why I would use these as examples for legitimate close protection personnel. Well, 1. To show that the criminals have trained shooters and weapons available 2. A lot of businesses overlap into the criminal world ranging from high-end jewellery to real estate. This is where you need to always do in-depth due-diligence on your clients, they may appear to be squeaky clean but, what's the real reason they need your services! So, understanding a little about snipers and counter sniper operations is an essential part of your operational planning and preparations.

Snipers

One thing I find amusing and annoying is that whenever there is a terrorist attack with an attacker using a long gun the media tends to immediately label the shooter as a sniper. There is a very big difference between a trained sniper and some idiot with a rifle and just because

someone served in the military to some extent it does not make them a sniper. But, with modern weapons and a little knowledge the wannabe jihadist or anarchist are still a serious threat.

Whether your potential threat is from specially trained personnel outfitted with state of the art equipment or merely an individual with average marksmanship skills, armed with an off the shelf rifle and tactics acquired from YouTube, you need to have plans in place to minimize the threat and procedures in place for dealing with active shooter situations.

There are five general types of shooters: the military sniper, the trained infantryman, the trained marksman, the trained shooter and the untrained armed civilian. Tactically each group have their own application and operational styles, you need to understand a little how they operate to identify the threat you could be under and plan effective countermeasures.

- Military Snipers: At the top of the sniper field are those who have been selected for and passed military sniper schools that usually last anywhere from two to three months. Note, I said selected for... Candidates for most military sniper ►

schools are usually selected to attend the courses after going through basic training and proving themselves capable soldiers within their units, to start with. In addition to long range shooting skills military trained snipers need to be experts in navigation, communications, camouflage, concealment and observation. These individuals are trained to select key individuals as their targets, stalk them and kill them at distance while avoiding detection.

- **The Trained Infantryman:** Infantry soldiers from professional armies should have no problems shooting and hitting a man-sized target at 300 meters (yards) with their service weapons in most weather conditions from a prone position. In addition to their shooting skills they are trained in camouflage, concealment, stalking and combat tactics.
- **The Trained Marksman:** Most law enforcement units and the like tend to have marksmen as part of their tactical units that should be trained in precision shooting past 300 meters. The law enforcement sniper schools last from 5 to 10 days and are commercially available to those who qualify. These schools put an emphasis on precision shooting at 100 to

300 meters, rather than the camouflage, concealment, stalking and combat tactics which are not needed by law enforcement units.

- **The Trained Shooter:** Most military personnel are trained to safely use, shoot, and qualify with a rifle on a regular basis, so they are trained to some extent, but the standards can vary to extremes. There are also the trained competition and recreational shooters who practice regularly and undertake professional marksmanship training but lack the tactical training. Hunters also fall into this category and tend to have at least a basic knowledge of camouflage and concealment.
- **The Armed Civilian:** These are shooters with little or no formal military or firearms training. You can see them all the time in the news reports from various international warzones. They have been given a rifle and ammunition and told which direction to shoot and that's about it. Their shooting is not accurate, they seldom deliberately target specific individuals but they have high potential to cause casualties far out of proportion to their actual skill level at close and medium ranges.

Hopefully you can see from

the descriptions above there is a lot more to being a real sniper than being able to hit a target at 100 meters and having your picture taken wearing a Walmart ghillie suit. What makes snipers extremely dangerous is their ability to be undetectable before and after killing their target; if you don't know where the threat is, how can you counter it? The art of fieldcraft is the bread and butter of the sniper; they can move undetected and have the discipline to stay virtually

motionless and alert for hours, if not days at a time to get a shot, this is what sets the professional sniper apart from the trained marksman.

The Tools of the Trade

The typical range for a military sniper attack is 300 to 600 meters with medium-caliber rifles, but depending on the environment, weapons available and the skill of the sniper undetected shots from 50 to 2400 meters plus are possible. ►



Some of the main calibers for sniper rifles are:

- .22: Even though this is a very small caliber .22 rifles make excellent close range sniper rifles, as they are small and easy to suppress. Within 100 meters with quality ammunition they should be able to deliver lethal head shots.
- .308/7.62x51mm: This round has been around since the 1950's and for many years was the standard round for NATO sniper rifles. This round, with the right weapon and shooter, can hit individuals at 800 meters and deliver harassing fire at 1000 meters plus.
- 7.62X54mm: The Russian military first introduced the 7.62X54mm round in 1891 and it is still in use today with the Dragunov sniper rifle and the PKM machine gun. When fired from quality sniper rifles the round is accurate out to 800 meters plus, I say quality because there are many inferior copies of the Dragunov on the market.
- .338: The .338 Lapua has gained popularity as a sniper rifle cartridge and has been used extensively in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In November 2009, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan British Army sniper, Corporal Craig Harrison, killed two Taliban

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machine gunners at a range of 2,475 meters using a L115A3 Long Range Rifle. This is the current record for longest recorded sniper kill. The .338 fired from military sniper rifles should be consistently accurate at 1500 meters but as you can see from Corporal Harrison shooting, it can reach out farther in skilled hands and in the right conditions.

- 9X39mm: This is a Russian round that is used in the suppressed VSK-94 & VSS Vintorez rifles which have an effective range of 400 meters and has been in use by Russians and others since 1987. The 9X39 is a heavy, subsonic round that has excellent penetration qualities against body armor.
- 14.5mm: The 14.5x114mm was developed in Russia during the cold war for heavy machine guns and anti-material rifles and is still used by many countries. There are numerous rifles chambered in this round with the average effective range of about 2000 meters.
- .50 Browning: The .50 Browning round was first developed as a heavy machine gun round in 1918 and today it's still in service internationally. In the Vietnam war USMC sniper Carlos Hathcock used a scoped M2 Browning machine gun to get a confirmed kill at 2250 meters. In the 1980's Barrett developed the M82 sniper rifle that has been used extensively in conflicts since then. These days they are quite a few manufacturers producing .50 sniper rifles for military, police, and commercial use. Sadly, many of these weapons have found their way into the hands of international terrorists. The average effective range of a quality .50 sniper rifle is about 1800 meters.
- 20mm: There are several rifles on the market chambered in 20mm, the American made Anzio has a reported maximum effective range of 5000 meters. There are several bullpup 20mm rifles such as the South African Denel NTW-20 and the Croatian RT-20 which would be a more maneuverable option for sniper operations but at approximately 19 kg (42 lbs) without ammunition they are not really stalking weapons. These weapons are meant for targeting vehicles, equipment and buildings. Vehicle mounted or in fixed position these rifles could be used with devastating effects as their ability to shoot through most common building materials would render ineffective most cover from fire positions. ►

There is a lot more to distance shoot that just having a scoped rifle and ammunition, you must ensure the rifle shoots straight to start with. I was chatting with a friend who had spent time in Syria with the Kurdish YPG and he mentioned how a lot of the sniper rifles the Kurds had were not accurate, which is common in such settings. I expect a lot of the weapons were old and had been banged around which is detrimental to a scoped rifle.

Scoped rifles need to be zeroed regularly to ensure the rounds are going where you want them. If the optics are damaged or not properly fitted this can also lead to inaccuracy. The rifle's barrel needs to be in good condition and taken care of; Romanian rifles used to have very low quality steel in their barrels, which lead to accuracy issues after minimal use. Ammunition needs to be of good quality, in many conflicts ammunition will come from various sources including the black market. Different ammunition will perform differently from the same rifle and old or damaged ammunition just might not be able to fly straight at all.

The weapon's sights are extremely important and the weapon needs to be zeroed to the shooter. If the shooters eyes are good with quality open sights they should be able to hit a man-sized target at ranges of 200 to 300 meters. For precision

and long distance shooting optics are a necessity and on the commercial market there are a vast array of scopes to fit all budgets. The quality of night sights have drastically improved over the last 20 years and they have become freely available on the commercial market. Simple and low cost optics will not enhance the performance of the average \$500.00 rifle into the accuracy class of true sniper weapon but these sights make the trained marksman a much more effective shooter at combat ranges out to 300 meters and beyond.

Many military sniper rifles are equipped with effective suppressors to either completely silence or greatly reduce the noise and muzzle blast of the weapon. Weapons such as the Russian VSK-94 & VSS Vintorez rifles have integrated suppressors on their barrels. Not only do suppressors reduce the noise of a weapon being fired, they also inhibit the task of trying to determine the location of a sniper. Suppressors can reduce the maximum effective range of a sniper rifle, but can be very effective when employed at less than 300 meters. Suppressors are available on the civilian market and are easy to manufacture, the legalities of ownership vary from location to location.

Read Part 2 of this article in Issue 38

Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 25 years. He has become accustomed to the types of complications that can occur, when dealing with international law enforcement agencies, organized criminal and Mafia groups. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time traveling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.



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