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COUNTERING SNIPERS PART 2

By: Orlando Wilson



Countering Sniper Operations

The first step in countering snipers is for everyone to be aware of the threat. This is where a threat assessment needs to be compiled and the realist threats need to be identified, if potential snipers are a threat then procedures need to be put in place.

In general, operational planning for a sniper threat should always be considered to some extent. Not only should counter sniper procedures be planned for but they need to be practiced, your people need to be trained at least in the basic reactions to fire and the use of cover, preferably before they are exposed to the sniper threat.

When compiling your threat assessment check media reports and talk with locals and those with knowledge of your area of operations. You need to determine what the threat level could be; are there trained personnel, what weapons are available and what's their motivation and objectives.

When planning counter sniper operations, you need to answer four basic questions that will help you to assemble effective procedures that are relevant to your situation.

- What is your task and objective?
- What equipment and weapons do you have?
- What does your opposition want to accomplish and have? ►



- What are the rules of engagement?

Rules of engagement are a very important consideration and can vary greatly, for example if you are caught up in an active sniper situation in an urban area in the US and you have a legal weapon on you, you cannot go blindly firing into potential sniper locations without positively identifying your target. Also, this puts you at risk of being mistaken for the active shooter and shot by police or other armed citizens. In a hostile or combat environment, your rules of engagement could be a lot freer but the limits of appropriate use of force need to be understood by everyone.

In many parts of the world people openly carry firearms and just because someone has a firearm it does not make them a threat. Also, just because someone is shooting, it does not mean they are shooting at you or being hostile. There is a big difference between someone

in your vicinity shooting in the air and you being shot at with accurate and effective fire. You need to be able to determine the difference and plan your reactions accordingly.

Counter sniper procedures are mainly common sense and should be ingrained in most former military personnel with any hostile environment experience. Basically if you can't be seen, you can't be shot, so limit your exposure, always make maximum use of cover, and move tactically. Remember, the sniper always has the initiative unless detected and is trained to wait for hours for a target or the time when your guard is down.

- Use concealed routes
- Avoid open plazas and intersections
- Stay away from and don't linger in doorways and windows
- Move along the side of streets, not down the center
- Stay in the shadows.
- When moving with others stay spread out and use



“If you can't be seen, you can't be shot, so limit your exposure, always make maximum use of cover, and move tactically.”

- bounding over watch
- Go around well-lit areas at night
- Never be silhouetted against lights, skyline or light backgrounds
- Move quickly and quietly across open areas that cannot be avoided.
- Make maximum use of cover and concealment
- Do not gather with others in large groups in the open
- Conduct all meetings, gatherings of personnel undercover
- Do not wear anything that could draw attention to you
- Do not establish routines

After your threat assessment has been compiled you need to survey the area around your location for potential firing positions that a threat sniper could use and routes in and out of those locations. Once identified those locations need to be monitored where possible, occupied with friendly forces, booby trapped or made unusable for a threat sniper. Clear any bushes or obstructions etc. that could be

used as cover by snipers or inhibit your view of potential sniper positions.

Now in many urban and rural locations the potential positions for threat snipers will be endless, so your only option will be to limit exposure; if you can't be seen you can't be shot! Board up windows or put up screens to block the lines of sight for threat snipers. Canvas or plastic sheets can be used to make a dangerous alleyway or street crossing safer. In the long term, fixed positions, more solid barriers and defenses can be put in place such as sand bags or earth filled 55 gallon drums etc.

Here are some basic military considerations for counter sniper procedures that can be adapted to the civilian world. Not everything will apply to everyone and all situations

- Cameras: These days' surveillance cameras are widely available and can be

- 1) Dash- a moving target is harder to hit than a stationary target.
- 2) Down- keep low and present a smaller target.
- 3) Get into cover from fire.
- 4) Observe where the threat is.
- 5) If armed return fire.

● **Winning the fire-fight:** If armed as soon as the threat has been firmly located, you must bring down sufficient accurate fire on the threat to incapacitate them or force them into cover so you can extract yourself from the kill zone.

● **Re-organizing:** As soon as you have incapacitated the opposition or are in a safe area, you must reorganize yourself as quickly as possible to be ready for other possible threats. You need to re-load your weapon, make sure that you or anyone with you is not injured and inform law enforcement, emergency, or support services immediately.

Where the rules of engagement allow, suppressing fire can be directed at the general area of the sniper's location to force them into or keep them behind cover, so you can move to a safer cover or extract from the sniper's kill zone. Look for and shoot at objects close to the sniper's position that would

cause ricochets and flying debris, such as brick, plastered or concrete walls. Also, you need to be aware of injuries from ricochets and debris when being shot at! In hostile environments and combat zones maximum use should be made of what light, medium and heavy weapons available.

Make maximum use of smoke dischargers where available and use the smoke to cover your movement. Commercially smoke signals are available from maritime stores as they are used for emergency signals on boats, also various smoke bombs are used for paintball and airsoft games. In a major city chances are you cannot carry firearms but can legally carry a couple of smoke bombs, if an active shooter situation develops drop smoke and bugout!

It is very important that you understand the difference between cover from view and cover from fire; you always want to locate the latter where possible. You need to consider which type of rounds will be stopped by the cover you're using. A table might be able to stop a .32 fired from a handgun, but a .50 round from a M82 will go through it and you.

If planning the defense for a building you need to consider

what caliber of rounds the inner and outer walls can stop. Also, where large caliber rounds can penetrate walls you can expect bricks and plaster to splinter within the rooms and cause injuries. You also need to take note of any surfaces that would cause incoming rounds to ricochet within the building.

Cover from view means you can't be seen but can be shot and includes:

- Cardboard boxes and empty rubbish bins
- Bushes
- Thin walls and fences
- Thin tabletops
- Doors
- Shadows

Cover from fire means, depending on the firearm used, you can't be seen or shot and includes:

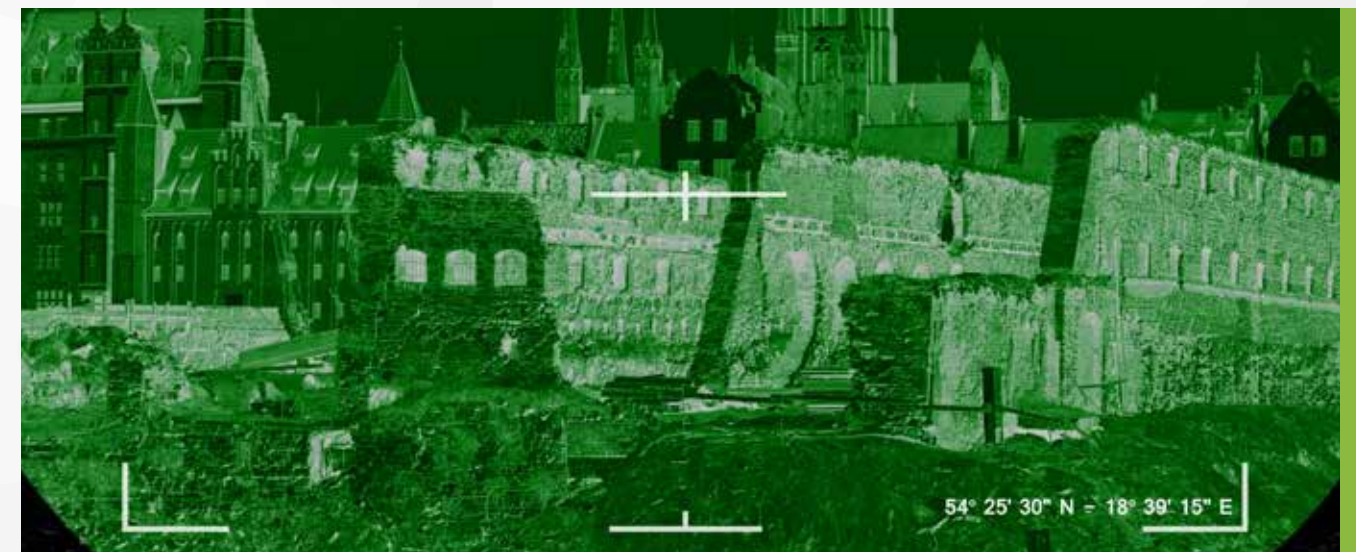
- Thick tabletops
- Heavy furniture
- Stone and concrete walls
- Dead ground

- Thick trees
- Various areas of a car
- Curb stones
- Re-enforced barriers

When you get into cover, you should always try to have an escape route and try not to get pinned down. When using cover as a shield, always keep low and fire or look around cover- not over it. When you are in cover and need to move, first select the next piece of cover that you will move to and move fast and keep low. Keep the distances between cover positions short. When you get behind the cover, assess your situation, where the threat is, etc. Keep moving this way until you are out of danger.

Hunting the hunters

When a sniper threat has been identified and you have the trained personnel, weapons and are within your rules of engagement, you should take



active measure to eliminate or capture the sniper.

Potential indicators that threat snipers are in your area could be:

- Personnel seen wearing camouflage uniforms
- Individuals in possession of binoculars, range-finders, and well-maintained scoped rifles
- Hearing single-shot fire.
- A lack of locals in an area before a shooting incident
- Reflections spotted from optical lenses
- Small groups of (one to three) local personnel wandering around or observing your location for no apparent reason.

To capture or eliminate a threat sniper you need to identify a pattern in their modus operandi such as:

- Time of day of sightings or shooting
- Direction of incoming sniper fire
- Location of threat sniper sightings
- Patrols would need to look

for material evidence of threat snipers being in a location such as broken foliage, hide positions, cigarette butts, food, body waste, empty rounds casings or discarded equipment

Once a pattern in the sniper's routine has been identified, be it the location of a potential firing position, a route in or out of that position a covert ambush would need to be set and the sniper killed or captured. Note: Kill or capture operations need to be kept on a need to know basis, regular routines need to be maintained as not to alert the threat sniper or surveillance that they are being targeted.

Conclusion

Hopefully this article has given you an insight into counter-sniper operations and will enable you to draw up some plans and procedures to fit your needs and circumstances. Sadly, we all need to keep the threat from active sniper shooting in mind and be prepared to deal with worse case scenarios.

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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