An essay on
The Evolution of Snipers and their implications on the modern day battlefield
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Sniping is a very personal war; for a sniper must kill calmly and deliberately, shooting carefully selected targets, and must not be susceptible to emotions...they will see the looks on the faces of the people that they kill

INTRODUCTION
1. The snipe is a small, fast-flying game bird found in the marshes of Scotland and England. Renowned for its agile, twisting flight, it is an extraordinary target to shoot. A sportsman with a flintlock gun who was able to bring down a snipe was considered an accomplished shot; and at sometime during the mid 18th century the term snipe shooting was simplified to sniping and by the late 19th century sniping was a well established word for an above average shot.
2. The sniper is a selected soldier who is a trained marksman and observer, who can locate and report on the enemy; however well concealed, who can stalk or lie in wait unseen and can kill with one shot.
3. The aim of this essay is to trace the evolution of Snipers and outline their role and capability in today's warfare. The scope of this essay will be the history and development of Snipers and the employment of their surgical strike capability and flexibility on the modern day battlefield.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT
4. The development of the first firearms brought about the beginning of sharp shooting and marksmanship.
5. From the medieval times until the middle of the 19th century most firearms had an effective aimed range of no more than 80 yards. These earlier firearms were not designed for accuracy but for speed of loading and firing. Those soldiers that could capture the art of employing accurate fire with these rifles were described a marksman or sharpshooter. A marksman/sharp shooter is a soldier who consistently achieves a high standard of shooting and who is trained to inflict casualties on opportunity targets using standard individual weapons.
6. After the industrial revolution gunsmiths had new and more efficient barrel boring machines giving them the ability to produce more accurate and longer ranging firearms. For the marksmen this meant an increase in engagement range and the confidence that their rounds would effectively strike their targets. One of the first isolated uses of these marksmen was when the British Army clashed with the Colonial forces in the American War of Independence (1775-1783). Here the Americans deployed highly trained marksmen to the flanks of the highly visible and tightly packed British Forces, causing havoc and inflicting high levels of casualties.
7. The British Army’s first real use of marksmen was the formation and deployment of the 95th Rifles (Modern Royal Green Jackets) and the Kings Rifle Corps during the Peninsular War against France from 1808-1814. Soldiers from these units were dressed in dark green uniforms instead of more traditional red and employed well machined Baker rifles to accurately engage advancing French troops before they came into the range of the musket armed Redcoats. These soldiers that adopted camouflage uniforms to aid in concealment and used small groups and manoeuvre tactics to achieve their engagements became known as ‘skirmishes’. The employment of these skirmishes could be considered early examples of the development and employment of snipers and sniping.
8. Throughout the following years and conflicts, commanders and soldiers became to realize the effect that skilled marksman or snipers had on the battlefield. Armies soon began developing and training their own snipers through sniper and scouting schools. By combining specially trained and selected men from these schools and arming them with the best weapons and observer optics available individual sniper units began to evolve. Examples of these were the US Berdan Sharpshooter Regiments during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the British Lovat Scouts in the early nineteen hundreds. The Lovat Scouts were primarily raised from Highlander game-keepers or ‘Ghillies’. Camouflage became a vitally important element of sniping, and the Lovats were to introduce the ghillie suit. The ghillie suit comprised of a loose Hessian robe covered with green materials and bundles of grass which the Lovats used to help blend into the landscape. The ghillie suit was to become a favourite garment of British snipers and one that would come to be used by snipers all over the world to this day.
9. Prior to WW1 Cavalry and Lancer units were deemed to be a commander’s ultimate weapon and main effort; however,
with the outbreak of WW1 and the concept of trench warfare snipers began to play a major role. The Germans had within their ranks a wealth of marksman who had been game-keepers in large German forests. They not only had natural hunter instincts, but also a wide selection of optical sights fitted to their hunting rifles. These hunters very quickly had devastating effects against British troops in opposing trenches and within weeks the term ‘Sniper’ became a scare word. The British soon realized the effect of these snipers and began re-raising their earlier developed sniper units to produce high quality snipers who could effectively engage these German hunter snipers (today this can be termed as counter-sniping) and dominate the trench systems.

10. From both sides of the trenches commanders quickly began to discover that snipers possessed another valuable asset other than surgical engagement, this being observation and reporting. With the increase in the development of optics and combined with their arduous training, snipers were quickly employed by commanders on the battlefield to report on changes in the area of operations and enemy routine. The detailed content of sniper log books quickly began to filter up the chain of command to help paint the larger enemy picture and help commanding officers and intelligence units make accurate decisions, assumptions and deductions. One such example was when a British sniper noticed that on a certain point of a German parapet to his front, there was always a very well fed cat that remained within a tight boundary. This led him to believe that the cat was being well looked after by the Germans within that area, and since he knew that food was in short supply he deduced that the cat had found itself some officers to befriend. This observation was duly passed up the chain of command where it was acted upon with an artillery barrage. It was later found that this barrage had destroyed an enemy command bunker and all inside.

11. During the period of WW1, period when snipers were performing observation and intelligence gathering roles it was discovered that using a pair of men was better than one individual sniper. The combination of two men allowed there to be a dedicated shooter and observer. This allowed the sniper and observer to concentrate on their individual role and cancelled the duel tasking of roles required when operating alone. A sniper pair also had the ability to work for longer periods and engage more accurately out to longer ranges due to the observer spotting the shooters fall of shot. This period also saw the introduction of multi-purpose ammunition that was issued to German snipers in limited quantities to use against steel loopholes and machine guns, giving them a considerable technical advantage.

12. WW2 brought about the continuing development of military snipers, specifically the trialing of enhanced optics and firearms, and the confirmation of sniper tactics learnt in WW1. By WW2 a number of cultures and origins of snipers had been seen from countries such as Russia, Germany, UK, America and Asia bringing a number of new ideas and concepts into the profession of sniping. This also included the concept of women snipers, mainly from Russia. The American operations conducted in the Pacific Islands were plagued by Japanese stay behind snipers who caused numerous casualties and held up many advances. In Europe the Allied landings at Normandy were also the targets of German sniper operations in which it is believed that the German snipers were found to be using suppressed rifles and ammunition.

13. Further conflicts in Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan (1980) provided many valuable lessons for snipers and the profession of sniping. Unfortunately many of these lessons are only known by soldiers that now lie in shallow graves. These conflicts also saw the introduction of new optics and revolutionary technology such as the Starlight Night Vision scope, used in Vietnam.

14. Over the following years up to the present time snipers have appeared in many conflicts including the Gulf wars, Somalia, Kosovo/Balkans and Chechnya employing many new and state of the art variants of firearms, optics, ammunition and other enhanced technologies further increasing their ability to reach out to the enemy. An abundance of lessons have been brought out throughout this time allowing the continual increase in the development and operational employment of snipers. With current world instability, trouble spots and the increase in new technologies the role of the sniper can only continue to develop and grow over time.

EMPLOYMENT ON THE MODERN DAY BATTLEFIELD

15. The modern day battlefield environment can be described by the author as: an area which a military influences in which its activity of operations is bounded by the entire spectrum of conflict. Snipers can be deployed in all phases of war, low level operations, in any weather, day or night and any battlefield environment. Snipers have specific roles/areas of employment which can be implemented into a commander’s battle plan to achieve a desired effect. These areas include: the destruction of key personal or equipment; counter-sniping; to delay and disrupt enemy operations; battlefield commentary and to gather battlefield intelligence through observation and reconnaissance.

16. The destruction of key enemy commanders or assets breaks down the enemy command chain and/or ability to conduct specific tasks requiring specialized equipment or weaponry. To target these critical vulnerabilities snipers are required to conduct heavy observation and wait patiently to identify the key target and its movements and a possible window of engagement. It also demands a high level of camouflage and concealment to position oneself accurately to engage the target and tactically withdraw unnoticed. The development of new ammunition types such as armour piercing rounds and the further development of optics and sniper rifles have greatly increased the ability for snipers to destroy hard and key targets accurately at longer ranges.

17. Counter sniping may be considered to be one of the most demanding tasks of a sniper. To effectively destroy enemy snipers has a great effect on lowering morale of enemy troops, forward reconnaissance elements and to an extent, blinding the enemy commander through lack of information. A sniper may be used to screen or guard a large force from enemy recon or sniper elements. To effectively achieve this, a sniper must master his camouflage and concealment of his hides and movements maintain high discipline and avoid setting patterns to deny or minimize being tracked and engaged. He

An artist’s impression of an American Sniper pair in the Gulf War.
must also study his enemy counter-parts tactics, routine, doctrine and be prepared for the unexpected to be able to identify a possible window of engagement.

18. Snipers can be effectively employed to conduct harassing operations by repetitively engaging the enemy at maximum ranges from multiple axes, at choke points and/or key times. This gains commander’s further time for planning and/or effects a change in the enemy’s route, formation or speed of movement. The creation of this change also gives the higher commander the ability to shape and draw the enemy into engagement areas, disrupt the enemy’s tactical deployment and force him to conduct hasty, unplanned vulnerable tactics. There have been many examples over time where a single sniper has disrupted and delayed military formations. The ability to create this effect highlights why snipers are high priority targets on the battlefield to counter sniping, artillery barrages and large enemy forces illustrating why the individual sniper must be highly trained to stay undetected, and be able to conduct arduous escape and evasion tactics if compromised or captured. This also highlights when snipers or other RS&I assets are employed they need to supported by high command to provide the safety net or capability umbrella to effectively allow them to achieve a clean break and withdrawal when required.

19. With the ever increasing development of optics, digital cameras, radios and other technology snipers are now capable of observing the enemy from longer range stand off positions. This allows them to provide detailed content of enemy dispositions, habits, reactions and morale outside of enemy engagement ranges. This information allows the commander to conduct a more accurate and precise appreciation process to make sound decisions on the battlefield from the early preparatory and assault phases of conflict through to the final stages of the exploitation and reorganization phases. Since the discovery of the sniper observation capability and due to the continual demand for battlefield intelligence by commanders, it could be argued that sniper observation and reporting could be seen as a duel primary role to killing selected enemy.

20. A snipers observation could be selected as his centre of gravity, as without it he can not identify his target and destroy it. His enhanced and varied types of optics, ammunitions and rifles and superior training would make up his critical requirements that provide him with his critical capabilities. These include his capabilities to penetrate armour, remain undetected and observe and engage out to extended ranges beyond the enemy’s weapons ranges. However, a sniper also has a variety of vulnerabilities. Some of the most obvious are his force ratio, limited mission time when in isolation, a high priority target and extensive information source for the enemy if captured. These vulnerabilities emphasize the importance for the careful consideration required by commanders when employing and integrating snipers into their battle plan.

CONCLUSION

21. This essay has traced the historical development, evolution and tactical employment of snipers throughout time. The chronological timeline has illustrated the tactical lessons learnt and development of sniper specific equipment, and how these attributes have helped develop the current modern day sniper and associated capability. Early conflicts and sniper units such as the Sharpshooters and Lovats pioneered the current sniper characteristics of camouflage and concealment, tactical employment and soldier skills. Further conflicts and battlefield environments such as trench warfare have clearly helped confirm and develop the skills learnt by these pioneering units. They have also been an experimental theatre to continually trial new concepts, ammunitions, firearms and optics.

22. The continual dedication to sniper training and their operational employment has given commanders extensive opportunities to utilize snipers in all spectrums of conflict and help define the capabilities that they can provide them. The introduction of new generation equipment such as night vision equipment, thermal imaging observation devices and enhanced cameras is further developing the sniper into a multi skilled and highly regarded asset in a commander’s orbit, and a toxic vermin to the enemy.

23. Today’s snipers and their training must be attributed to those lone marksmen that have gone before them and returned to tell their experiences. The industrial revolution combined with the increase in world optics and technology has been a critical requirement for the evolution of snipers and their capability. These events and inventions have continued to supply snipers with state of the art firearms and optics to continuously enhance their engagement capability and continually increase their observation abilities.

24. Modern day battle fields and deployments see the sniper as a ghost-like figure that is strategically sited or deployed to carry out a variety of specific tasks. With continual training and increase in resources to snipers throughout the world the surgical strike ability that they maintain will remain as a lethal capability that commanders may use in future battles. In the authors opinion the word ‘sniper’ on tomorrows battlefields will still bring a dry swallow and second thought to those enemy that oppose them, as it did in the trenches in WW1.