

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



Sharpshooter: ‘Observe, Judge Distance and Engage Targets in Priority’

Major Nicholas Payne

JCSP 49

Service Paper

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2023.

PCEMI n° 49

Étude militaire

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n’engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté le Roi du Chef du Canada, représenté par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2023.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 49 – PCEMI 49
2022 - 2023

Service Paper – Étude militaire

**SHARPSHOOTER:
‘OBSERVE, JUDGE DISTANCE AND ENGAGE TARGETS IN PRIORITY’**

Major Nicholas Payne

“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

« La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale. »

SHARPSHOOTER: ‘OBSERVE, JUDGE DISTANCE AND ENGAGE TARGETS IN PRIORITY’

AIM

1. The Canadian Army (CA) currently lacks a program for the delivery of lethal small-arms precision effects aside from Snipers. This service paper will outline why courseware already develop will solve this issue but only if implemented CA wide.

INTRODUCTION

2. The Sharpshooter courseware was developed by A Company (ARES) of 1R22eR and re presents the instructional training program absent within the Canadian Army’s Operational Shooting Program. As such, the Sharpshooter courseware instructs candidates in observation techniques, judging of distance and the precision engagement of prioritized targets. Qualified Sharpshooters can be readily employed as designated marksman along with Snipers, but only as a secondary duty within infantry sections and platoons.

DISCUSSION

3. The Sharpshooter courseware is designed to train soldiers to ‘Observe, Judge Distance and Engage Targets in Priority’. Most importantly the courseware embodies the CA’s initiatives to foster innovation and equally manifests the CAF’s ‘Expertise’ cornerstone of the ‘Profession of Arms’.

The morning fog sat ominously across the estuary to their front, as did a sharp frost that seemed to find a way into their bones. Their visibility reduced but slightly from their position to the perpendicular row of houses at just 425m. This line of fire would be unencumbered as would their vision - provided the wind remained predictable. The wind in the last several days had come from over their right shoulder and interestingly enough seemed to hold an extra quarter value in the early hours. The cold front that dropped into the area overnight brought with it an eerie silence over the platoon’s position – making most uncomfortable. Despite being the youngest member of the section, Sam had been graced with no night watch and arose early to accompany the section commander on the early morning observation shift.

4. The Sharpshooter courseware demands 10x training days distributed across Performance Checks (PC) and Educational Outcomes (EO). During EO 401, Sharpshooter candidates will apply marksmanship theory and demonstrate understanding throughout complex shooting serials. In EO 402, they are instructed on observation techniques, target prioritization and must develop high fidelity range cards. Finally, EO 403 instructs techniques for judging distance using equipment organic to an infantry soldier.

5. These EOs are extracted from within the Army Basic Sniper Course and candidates must effectively demonstrate the ability to judge distance; identify human obstructions; identify enemy targets only to then prioritize said targets in accordance with orders. Assessment factors for this PC are drawn from Basic Sniper, Basic Reconnaissance Patrolman as well as the Infantry NCM DP1 courses thus simply reinforcing pre-existing common infantry skills/tasks.

The two lay awkwardly in their trench as but the most ironic and mixed bag of Canadian soldiers – the irony of their contrasting life experiences not lost on either of them. Chris, a young, short, well fed and still wet behind the ears Voodoo Sargent from Levis alongside a 2m tall toothpick from rural Quebec. Sgt Chris couldn't help but be envious of Sam's long braided hair however only because Sgt Chris entered CEGEP looking like a bald Tom Cruise. Sam or Sdt (B) Samuel Desbiens-Ethier hailed from the northern shores of Quebec having joined the CAF in hopes of experiencing the world differently than those from his small hamlet. The same humility, focus and attention to detail that made Sam a target for bullies growing up would set the conditions for early success in a young Army career. A product of Op PARADIGN, Sam quickly volunteered and attended the unit's Sharpshooter course and excelled at the craft.

6. The barrier for candidature of the Sharpshooter course is but a current PWT-3, a current Force Test, a chain of command recommendation and finally be qualified 'Small-Arms Coach'. 'Small-Arms Coaches' are qualified over 5x days of training in existing Weapon Effects Simulator infrastructure and where the courseware targets even the most junior CAF members. The sharpshooter course has the real potential to generate interest in the craft amongst junior members. This qualification provides them with an opportunity and gateway to foster technical proficiency within the profession.

Fast forward 4 months and Sam is now 6 days from the last hot shower and 5 days from the last fresh meal. Sam and Sgt Chris remind each other of how 'unique' the positions they find themselves in holding but one of the few land bridges between violence and the alliance. As Sam validates the range card, the two hear the distinct sound of knocking diesel motors in the distance. Initially, they aren't certain if it is but another civilian truck fleeing the violence just kilometers to their front or the enemy for which they have been tasked to block.

7. A Sharpshooter is an infantry soldier first. Though they may deliver precision lethal fires and execute deliberate observation tasks – their primary role remains as a contributing member of an infantry section. Though the tactical situation may require unique opportunities for employment, they are neither trained nor designed to work in isolation from their team or leadership. When required, Sharpshooters complement the application of effects to achieve the greater needs of their tasked unit. As the purpose of this service paper is not to situate Sharpshooters in doctrine, their placement and employment will occur naturally once the capability and capacity grows. In terms of introducing new capabilities like this one, doctrine should be considered and situated as a lifejacket and not a straight-jacket preventing creativity and evolution.

As the rumble of motors grows louder, so does the radio chatter and very quickly the remainder of the platoon is amongst them. Fearing enemy EW sensors, the platoon communicates with hand signals and the odd field phone transmission – Sam briefly looks over to find Sgt Chris communicating in what is best described as the hand signals of a 3rd base coach. Sgt Chris is signaling to Alex - the platoon commander - that their 'borrowed' drone has picked-up enemy vehicles moving towards their location. With this information, Lt Alex - again through a series of

confusing hand signals that mimic an 80's-era dance move - orders the 'borrowed' British Javelins forward to the flanks.

8. Sharpshooters execute the orders of their commander in a manner that can protect and further conceal the location of high-value weapon systems. When presented with an enemy conducting reconnaissance by force or probing patrols, Sharpshooters can deliver effects maximizing the effective range of their weapons. Sharpshooters are not snipers and are not designed to replace or be employed as such. Snipers remain a unit level resource which provide greater flexibility and lethality for an infantry battalion in battle. Though courseware for Sharpshooter draws extensively from the Basic Sniper Course, the mission planning, operational independence and effective range of snipers remains superior to those of Sharpshooters. However, similar to Snipers, the pursuit of technical proficiency can embolden, empower and invigorate junior members of the profession of arms – no different than any other sub-specialty.

Minutes that feel like hours pass as the rumblings grow louder but Sam grows calmer. Repeating the mantra of the Sharpshooter, Sam tells himself 'observe, judge distance, engage targets in priority'. Re-confirming the distances using a prominent baby blue and yellow door, Sam adjusts his Elcan C79. He knows that a 7-foot door is but a tall human and that against the aiming post, this door lies at 425 meters. The same jet-black braid of hair that Sgt Chris admired just minutes earlier comes alive with that dreaded morning cross-wind. Sam's knows to use Kentucky windage to aim off slightly from the target – it doesn't concern him.

9. Sharpshooters are deliberately designed to execute tasks with the equipment organic to the infantry soldier. Techniques for observation, judging of distance and engaging of targets are instructed, demonstrated and evaluated with the C7/C8 and Elcan C79 Optic. Though more advanced equipment may augment their employment and effects, Sharpshooters remain infantry soldiers first and Sharpshooters second.

10. A key to success for Sharpshooter course - found in EO 401 - is the instruction of the non-linear ballistics characteristics of the CAF issued 5.56 NATO cartridge. Candidates are instructed of these characteristics in concert with the Elcan C79 Optic enabling them to engage up to 600m by day and 500m by night. Similarly, and again in EO 401, candidates are instructed and must demonstrate understanding of the effects of wind, elevation, air-temperature and shooting in complex terrain. Most importantly, candidates are re-introduced to marksmanship principles and must demonstrate their understanding during both written and practical evaluations.

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority' is what Sam repeats to himself as means of calming his heartrate. This idea of the Sharpshooter is now going to be tested from but a concept at 1R22eR to what is very much real-life. Sam is grateful for having received the training.

11. Though conceptualized many times across the CA and found amongst allied infantry doctrine, the CA has until now failed to develop and deliver courseware that produces Sharpshooters. However, starting in summer 2021, A Company (ARES) of 1R22eR began developing and has executed some 7 Sharpshooter serials. No longer but a good idea, the

Sharpshooter courseware includes: a complete QSTP; lesson plans in presentation form; evaluation forms; a comprehensive library of shooting serials and all of which is bilingual.

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

But then, the rumble stops and is replaced with the sound of hatches slamming and the universally recognized banter amongst soldiers – but this banter is in a language Sam doesn't recognize. As Sam 'observes, judges distance and prioritizes targets' shadows appear through the ever-present early morning fog - nothing but faint silhouettes moving about hurriedly.

As quickly as the rumbling stopped – it starts up again – but this time louder and more distinct. The creaking and squeaking of tracks pivoting confirms their intentions. The rumble of the motors barely masks the carnage for which the vehicles are doing to the former homes of the innocent – a flare of anger rushes Sam's veins. But Sam calms himself:

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

12. Despite what creative fiction has led society to believe, modern combat and pan-domain conflict will not occur remotely from the comfort of our homes. Though Bits and Bots may optimize and expedite decisions, Blood and Guts will remain the consequence of failure in combat. The complexity of the contemporary operating environment has seen the pooling and subjugation of lethal effects to increasingly dislocated and higher headquarters. The application of lethality however remains the roll of the infantry section and Sharpshooters can be the precise tool for its delivery.

13. As the illegal invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated, a single well-trained soldier can cause havoc on even the best trained enemy. In an environment where command and control is reduced due to competition along the electro-magnetic spectrum and where concealment from drones remains a premium, decentralized lethality will always win. Sharpshooters aren't a gateway to increased violence but instead a mechanism for the more precise and by default effective use of force. Sharpshooters can increase unit effectiveness at all stages of conflict and across the spectrum of intensity.

It's at this point that Sam sees the first vehicle appear right next to that distinct baby blue and yellow door. Sam quickly recognizes the significance of that vehicle – it is a BMP-3 with the tell-tale signs of a commander's presence – the row antennas

'This is the priority target, they are at 425m and I'm observing'

Sgt Chris who has now crawled to Sam's side whispers 'Sam, you have first shot – Allons-Y'. Sam has been tasked to fire the first shot in the platoon's best nightmare and the pressure alone causes a 20 point drop in heartrate.

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

'Observe, judge distance and engage targets in priority'

'This is the priority target, they are at 425m and I'm engaging'

BANG – BANG – BANG – BANG – 'Exhale'

As Sam's grip of the weapon prepares for fire, 4 rounds of 5.56 crack and collide first with the BMP's optic and second the crew commander.

Sam broke the peace on that cold damp day but the platoon, their 'borrowed' Javelins and maybe a drone, broke the enemy's will. Sam hadn't the institutional knowledge to understand how targeting the commander broke the enemy's ability and will to fight – but Sam did as soldiers do – execute orders.

Sam was but the decentralization of precision fires and lethality that lead to the platoon's success in the zero-sum game of modern conflict. Sam's humble application of knowledge earned a slot on Sharpshooter and the application of instruction delivered deadly effects.

CONCLUSION

14 Designed with a barrier for entry in-line with normal readiness levels – it can be re-qualified in a manner mirroring that of the PWT-3. Instructors need not be qualified as the courseware but collates existing instruction and manifests the courseware that the Operational Shooting Program fails to provide. National course delivery and start states need not be impeded by the lack of qualified instructors as the courseware is both complete and intuitive for members. This will have the effect of developing a disciplined and highly capable shooting culture across the CA.

15. Sharpshooter courseware was designed and developed deliberately for decentralized instruction. Though marksmanship culture across the CA has suffered in recent years due to rationalization of resources and converging institutional pressures – it must only be awoken. Sharpshooter is a qualification that requires but 10 days of instruction in mixed settings but primarily shooting ranges. The course has a scalable min/max course load of 18/28 with a student ratio of 2:10 and requires but 650 rounds of 5.56 per candidate. Costing roughly \$5,500 per course of 25 candidates, it draws on personnel and equipment found within in any Infantry Company. 1R22eR has run some 7x serials of the course making improvements to evolve content and optimize delivery. Though at a cost to the unit training calendar – it has reinvigorated the unit's shooting culture and ultimately the pursuit of technical proficiency and mastery by its members. Shooting culture is not at all unique to 1R22eR and should be fostered across the CA – Sharpshooter courseware need not be limited to just the Infantry Corp.

16. While opponents may claim that the C7/C8, 5.56mm or Elcan C79 is insufficient for the task – it remains the most relevant system to ensure that practitioners remain infantry soldiers first and Sharpshooters second. With the eventual but serendipitous delivery and FOC of the C21, the courseware can be developed to include the weapon system but only to complement the C7/C8. Certain efficiencies can be maintained by not introducing C21 munitions though at a cost of range and stopping power provided by the C21's unique caliber.

RECOMMENDATION

18. The Sharpshooter courseware developed by A Company (ARES) from 1R22eR should be examined for expedited approval within the CA Individual Training System and implemented across the CA.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Connable, Ben, Abby Doll, Alyssa Demus, Dara Massicot, Clint Reach, Anthony Adler, William Mackenzie, Matthew Povlock, and Lauren Skrabala. *Russia's Limit of Advance: Analysis of Russian Ground Force Deployment Capabilities and Limitations*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2020.
- Department of National Defense, CFJP 01, Canadian Military Doctrine (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009).
- Department of National Defense, BGL-321-005/FP-001, Battle Group in Operations (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2021).
- South, Todd. 'Squad-Level Sniper Rifle to Complete Fielding by next Year'. *Army Times*, 30 March 2022.
- Suits, Devon. 'Army to Field SDM-R in September'. *Infantry News*, 6 June 2018.
- Zabrotskyi et al. *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022*. London, UK: RUSI Special Report, 2022.