Sniper / Counter Sniper Operations
Lessons and Observations
January – April 2007
OIF 05-07

17 July 2007

This unclassified document has been reviewed in accordance with guidance contained in United States Central Command Security Classification Guide 9901 dated 1 February 1999. This document contains information EXEMPT FROM MANDATORY DISCLOSURE under the FOIA. DOD Regulation 5400.7 R, Exemption 5 applies.

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Executive Summary

This report documents key points from a Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) collection team that deployed to Iraq during the period 8 January through 14 April 2007. The purpose of the collection was to document lessons and observations relating to pre-deployment training and operational experiences from OIF 05-07 in the interests of improving how Marine forces are organized, trained, and equipped.

The following are key lessons and observations from commanders, staffs, and scout snipers of Multi National Forces – West (MNF-W) in Iraq.

Bottom Line Up Front. **Several of the themes from this collection echo or mirror those from the Scout Sniper Employment Conference hosted by MCCLL in December 2006.**

- **Insufficient MOS trained 0317 scout snipers.**

- **Limited time between deployments to complete MOS training, and limited school seat availability.**

- **A perception among scout snipers that there was a lack of sound understanding of sniper employment concepts by supported commanders, with snipers being employed more in a reactive mode than a deliberate, planned, intelligence preparation of the battlefield mode.**

This report expands on an earlier quick look report on this same subject.

Organization and Staffing

Placement within the unit and staffing level of scout sniper platoons in theater varies. Most platoons were task organized under the S-2 section within the Headquarters and Service (H&S) Company, while some were resident in the Weapons Company. One visited sniper platoon was organized under the battalion S-3 section. These inconsistencies contributed to difficulties during relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA), with units transferring equipment to supplement platoons' tables of equipment (T/E). Sniper platoon size varied, dependent on the unit mission, operational tempo and the size of the area of operations (AO).

Shortfalls in MOS 0317 are filled by non-0317 (0311) Marines. Two platoon sergeants and one chief scout of a sniper platoon did not hold the 0317 MOS and lacked MOS related experience to effectively manage and employ a sniper platoon.

Training

Inconsistent levels of individual sniper training and limited throughput of formal schools directly affect Marine scout sniper platoons' combat effectiveness and indirectly affect unit commanders' confidence in sniper capabilities.

Scout snipers interviewed stated that the Scout Sniper Course, Scout Sniper Advanced Course, Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) Urban Sniper Course and the High Angle Shooting Package were effective in preparing them for deployment**.**

Snipers need more training on engaging multiple, limited exposure, moving targets from positions other than the prone. Due to the lack of training in these areas, sniper teams have had to learn these firing techniques during combat operations.

Snipers need more training in urban environments with role players simulating the presence of local national and Iraqi Security Force (ISF) personnel.

Pre-deployment Training (PTP)

On average, sniper platoons had ten months between deployments which was not enough time to replace the trained Marines leaving the platoon due to transfers and end of active service (EAS). Time between deployments coupled with limited school seat availability often precluded sending Marines to the Scout Sniper Course and required PTP.

Snipers stated that the lack of sniper employment knowledge within commands greatly reduced sniper employment opportunities during PTP workup.

Sniper platoon PTP organization and training were not based on AO-specific information from units in theater. Platoons arrived in theater without an appreciation of the unit's limitations and capability gaps associated with that AO. Additionally, sniper platoons did not train on all of the weapons they employed in theater.

Equipment

Given sniper platoons' varying sizes and organization there were shortfalls in required mission essential equipment. Shortfalls included night optics, sound suppressors, communications equipment and the light weight/modular personal protective equipment (PPE).

Several key personnel and snipers noted the need for lighter equipment. The collective weight and bulk of mandated PPE, snipers' mission essential equipment and sustainment made mobility and maneuver difficult.

Snipers lacked the ability to effectively observe and engage at night with current night optics and thermal imagers.

Snipers stated that the Modular Integrated Communications Helmet (MICH) is an improvement over the standard issue Kevlar helmet, but Marines still have trouble when firing in the prone position. Most snipers take it off once in position and prior to firing.

Periscopes and screens were the best equipment snipers had available when conducting counter sniper operations. They allowed snipers to observe from behind covered positions.

There is no one individual weapon system that is most effective when conducting sniper operations. Snipers need the capability to rapidly engage multiple, limited exposure, moving targets with precision fire from 50 to 2,000 meters.

Operations and Employment

Snipers accounted for a high percentage of an infantry battalion's enemy KIA (specific numbers are classified).

Interviewees stated that units have a tendency to react to a threat by employing snipers in response to the most recent enemy activity vice shaping the battlefield in a proactive manner through reconnaissance, surveillance, human intelligence (HUMINT) and presence patrols.

Six man teams were preferred while operating in urban environments while four man teams were preferred in rural environments. Sniper teams were usually employed in mutually supporting positions.

Snipers expressed the view that they were more effective by remaining in general support of their battalion during deployment. On occasion, platoons operated successfully in direct support of a company.

Snipers reported having difficulty remaining undetected after 12-14 hours in urban environments due to team size and the lack of suitable positions to support the mission. Also, the lack of training that incorporates the presence of indigenous inhabitants in or around possible sniper positions precludes effective interaction with Iraqi civilians.

Counter Sniper Operations

Snipers expressed the view that the lack of sniper employment education is the most limiting factor for supporting unit commanders in effectively employing this organic asset.

Units tend to employ their snipers in areas of recent enemy sniper activities, reacting to the threat.

Snipers stated that the lack of sharing and dissemination of information to the lowest echelons was hindering units' situational awareness and ability to develop, refine and execute counter sniper TTPs.

At the time of this collection, there didn't appear to be one central organization in theater focusing specifically on the increasing enemy sniper threat. As of June 2007, a sniper defeat working group (SDWG) has been established with participation from MNF-W G-2, G-3 and others, to coordinate counter sniper activity in MNF-W.

The U. S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group provided a counter sniper briefing to Marine units that is considered by snipers to be the most relevant, AO specific brief in theater.

Units limit the enemy sniper threat by covering the enemy's observation and fires on fixed friendly positions, observation posts using ballistic glass for protection, and numerous other classified TTPs that address counter sniper tactics.

The remainder of this report discusses the above and other topics in greater detail.