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**Police Sniper Team Recommended Operation Standards and Equipment**

**Overview**

The American Sniper Association (ASA) is not a governing body and does not claim the authority to mandate the behavior of law enforcement sniper teams. Therefore, this document is not meant to be an order of compliance. Instead, this document is intended to list and recommend the best practices for sniper teams wishing to adopt and adhere to currently recognized industry standards within the sniper community. Following these standards will result in fielding a sniper program that is safe, efficient, mission-capable, and legally defensible.

This document was written to augment the sniper sections of the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) Tactical Response Operations Standards (TROS).

**Sniper Team Mission and Capabilities**

Police snipers should be trained and equipped to fulfill their duties as part of a law enforcement special operations team, often referred to as SWAT. These duties and capabilities are necessary for all snipers, regardless of their team’s Tier designation.

* The primary duty is to utilize their training and equipment to attain a position of advantage and covertly supply real-time information to the rest of the team. This capacity for covert information gathering can also be utilized for deliberate surveillance operations.
* The secondary duty is to provide lethal cover for SWAT personnel moving into the inner perimeter while patrol or other personnel are being relieved of their positions. The first on-scene police sniper should quickly deploy to the target location and occupy the side of the target where the suspect(s) is seen or was last seen.
* The third duty is to provide long-range lethal cover if required for the protection of any hostages, innocents, and law enforcement personnel on the scene at a tactical operation. This capability may also be utilized for protective overwatch situations.

**Team Staffing**

As stated in the NTOA TROS, minimum staffing for a part-time (collateral duty) SWAT team is 18 members, to include four full-time sniper positions. The ASA is in complete agreement with this standard. Every SWAT team should strive to have a minimum of four snipers. Each must be fully trained and equipped as snipers. And each should be dedicated sniper positions, utilized exclusively as such on all deployments, apart from extraordinary or exigent circumstances. However, while the snipers are being used in other roles, no one else on the team is trained or equipped to provide what they do on tactical deployments.

Larger teams should strive to expand the sniper unit to be proportionate to the overall manpower numbers. Although there isn’t a standard formula, a proposed ratio would be:

* 18-member team – 4 snipers
* 24-member team – 6 snipers
* 32-member team – 8 snipers

The ideal situation would be to have an additional person to function as the sniper team leader. This role could be fulfilled by a supervisor or a senior sniper who would be fully trained & sniper certified and could deploy dependent upon manpower issues. However, their primary responsibilities would entail ensuring snipers are deployed properly and occupying positions of advantage for the tactical operation. The sniper TL could also move as necessary to the command post and act as a direct liaison and point of contact for the snipers in the field depending upon the type of operation.

**Individual Sniper Equipment List**

**Required**

* Purpose-designed sniper rifle, bolt action or semi-auto, preferably .308 caliber, capable of sub-MOA accuracy
* Minimum of two magazines for rifle
* Tactical rifle sling
* Bipod, with pan, tilt, and swivel capabilities
* Data book for assigned rifle
* Soft transport case for sniper rifle
* Tactical rifle scope, minimum 3x15 power magnification range, 30 – 34mm tube, illuminated reticle
* Front-mounted night vision scope, minimum 1 per two-man team
* Suppressor designed to reduce decibels when fired and reduce flash and dust signature
* Primary, open-air ammunition, designed for maximal terminal performance (ballistic-tip or true hollowpoint design)
* Secondary round designed for reliable barrier penetration, i.e., bonded bullets or monolithic projectiles
* Rifle-rated tripod with rifle rest mount or direct mount capability
* Sidearm and appropriate holster
* Binoculars, minimum 7 power, 40mm objective lens, weatherproof
* Laser rangefinder
* Camouflage deployment uniforms, appropriate for area and season
* Compact, high intensity flashlight
* Personal first-aid kit
* Hydration system
* Hearing protection equipment
* Radio equipment, with PTT and headset

**Suggested**

* Secondary rifle system, semi-auto, preferably .223 caliber, capable of sub-MOA accuracy
* Low-power optic, with illuminated reticle
* Minimum of two magazines for rifle
* Suppressor designed to reduce decibels when fired and reduce flash and dust signature
* Data book for assigned rifle
* Primary, open-air ammunition, designed for maximal terminal performance
* Secondary round designed for reliable barrier penetration

**Optional**

* Loadbearing vest
* Soft body armor
* Plate carrier and rifle plate
* Body-worn camera

**Sniper Team Training**

**Initial Training**

Prior to deployment in a sniper capacity, every sniper must have attended and successfully completed a comprehensive police sniper school. This school must provide basic instruction in fieldcraft, tactics, hide construction, observation, reporting, maintenance, marksmanship, ballistics, and use of force. To cover these topics adequately, this school should provide a minimum of 40 hours of immersive instruction and hands-on experience. The course must conclude with a written exam and a qualification course, to validate comprehension and retention of the skills and information taught throughout the class.

**In-Service Training**

In-service training is necessary to build on the basic skills taught to the sniper during basic training, and to further enhance and expand his knowledge and overall skillset. The American Sniper Association Sniper Training Matrix illustrates in detail the training content needed to be covered on an annual basis for each sniper to learn, master and maintain that skillset. Based on that breakdown, it is our position that the sniper team should be expected to complete at least 192 hours of sniper training annually. How this is achieved is left to the individual agencies, recognizing scheduling issues. However, the necessary volume and content must be accounted for by the agency.

In-service training should be conducted by a certified sniper instructor. That instructor will be responsible for all aspects of the in-service training program, to include scheduling, logistics, administration, monitoring and documentation. Ideally, each team should have multiple snipers with the instructor credentials necessary to share the job and allow the other instructors to participate in the training.

**APPENDICES**

**Police Sniper Training Matrix**

**Content and Hours**

After graduating from a comprehensive police sniper school, sniper team members must receive ongoing training year-round to maintain their operational readiness. This document is a framework of necessary annual content, hours, and justification for a police sniper skills maintenance program. The justification is based on the ASA’s Police Sniper Essential Skills List, which was created to give form and purpose to sniper training. Note that by necessity and the unique nature of the competencies covered, much of this training will have to be conducted by, and administered to the sniper team, independent of other team elements.

Some areas of instruction should be addressed as a SWAT team at the beginning of the training year. Others should be scheduled quarterly, while several must be part of the monthly training evolution. Some topics will overlap synergistically with others, diminishing the need to train in each area separately, and to avoid redundancy. The goal is to make sure all topics and skills are addressed with the frequency and duration necessary for snipers to learn them, master them, and always maintain operational readiness.

**Operational Skills:**

**Team Review**

* Annual policy review (state use of force statutes, department deadly force policy, SWAT, and sniper team SOP, officer-involved shooting policy). This should be conducted with the entire SWAT Team – 4 Hours
* Annual equipment inventory and detailed inspection – 4 Hours
* Annual equipment reviews and testing (function, nomenclature) – 4 Hours

Total Annual Review Hours **12**

**Classroom Instruction Frequency Duration Total Hours**

Ballistics (external and terminal) 1x 2hr 2

Intermediate barriers 1x 2hr 2

Special shooting conditions (high angle, wind, low light) 1x 2hr 2

Hide construction (interior, exterior and vehicle) 1x 2hr 2

Observation 1x 4hr 4

Tactical Vision exercises 12x .5hr 6

Reporting and communications 1x 2hr 2

Camouflage 1x 2hr 2

Counter-sniper operations 1x 2hr 2

Sniper Survival Skills 1x 2hr 2

Target Assessment Program 1x 2hr 2

Case studies 12x 1hr 12

**Practical Exercises**

Full team scenario training 2x 4hr 8

Site diagramming (Range Cards) 4x 1hr 4

Distance estimation 2x 1hr 2

Observation exercises 4x 1hr 4

Concealment exercises 4x 1hr 4

Movement skills 4x 1hr 4

Hide construction 4x 2hr 8

Target Assessment 2x 4hr 8

Sniper Cover 2x 1hr 2

Sniper-initiated assaults 2x 1hr 2

Total Annual Academic Hours **82**

**FIREARMS**

* This section of the matrix is meant to organize the overall training goals. The design of the courses of fire is left to the individual training officer.
* In some instances, one range exercise may encompass several individual skill sets.
* The scheduling of range training must consider the need to practice all these listed skills in all seasons, and in both daylight and low light conditions. ALL the listed firearm skills must be duplicated and mastered in low light training conditions.
* If the team has night vision sighting equipment, additional training hours may be needed for both classroom instruction and live fire exercises.
* Range exercises take into account the time to set up, execute and then evaluate each course of fire.

**Firearms Skills Frequency Duration Total Hours**

Cold Shot 12x .25hr 3

Zero confirmation 12x .5hr 6

Fundamental drills 12x .5hr 6

Cover Safe drill 12x .5hr 6

Position work (Standing, Sitting, Kneeling) 12x .5hr 6

Stress shooting 12x .5hr 6

Simultaneous shooting 4x .5hr 2

Rollover prone 4x .5hr 2

Weak shoulder 4x .5hr 2

Hawkins position 4x .5hr 2

Partner supported shooting 4x .5hr 2

Improvised positions 4x 1hr 4

Gas mask 4x .5hr 2

Hostage-rescue 4x .5hr 2

Sniper-initiated techniques 4x .5hr 2

Vehicle hides 4x 1hr 4

Moving targets 4x 2hr 8

Target ID/discretionary shooting 4x .5hr 2

Extended distance shooting (2 – 300 yards) 2x 4hr 8

Defensive handgun drills 6x 1hr 6

Secondary rifle drills 6x 2hr 12

Weapon maintenance 12x 1hr 12

Total Annual Firearms Hours **105**

**Testing and Evaluation**

Sniper Functional Fitness Test 2x 1hr 2

Qualifications (All carried weapon systems) 4x 1hr 4

Total Annual Testing Hours **6**

**Cumulative Annual Sniper Training Hours 205**

**Supporting Documents and Publications**

ASA Training Position Paper

ASA Police Sniper Essential Skills List

ASA Police Sniper Utilization Survey Reports, 2005 – 2025 inclusive

*ASA Police Sniper Training and Operations Manual –* WIISAD Books

*Foundations of Sniper Marksmanship* – Blue 360 Media

Tactical Operations Standards – National Tactical Officers Association

**Sniper Functional Fitness Test**

**Rationale:** The position of police sniper requires a high level of physical fitness for the officer to be able to perform necessary job tasks safely and correctly. These include individual movement skills, navigating obstacles and carrying personal equipment. By the nature of SWAT calls, the sniper must also possess a level of conditioning which will allow him to handle physical stress and quickly recover from exertion and have the endurance and stamina to be able to continue perform at high mental and physical levels for an extended period. This testing program is intended to provide the sniper with a gauge of his current level of fitness in relation to functional fitness demands.

The standards and scoring are intentionally age neutral. In the real world of tactical operations, no special compensation will be made for an older sniper. Expectations of his performance level will be the same as that for a younger sniper. Therefore, the standards will reflect those same expectations.

**Disclaimer Note:** *We recognize that SWAT personnel and snipers come in both genders. The use of masculine words nouns like “he” and “his” throughout this document do not connote any preferences, prejudices, or limitations. They should be read as gender neutral.*

**Equipment:** The testing will be performed on an open field, providing at least 100 yards of unobstructed area for movement portions of the test. Administrators will need stopwatches, a tape measure, and a scoring sheet. Traffic cones or something similar will be used to mark distances and lanes.

Snipers will perform most portions of the test dressed in their regular callout uniforms, which must include long sleeve BDU top, or long sleeve t-shirt, boots, gun belt and unloaded sidearm (dummy gun is acceptable). For the Core Strength and Broad Jump phases, the BDU top and gun belt can be removed. For Stage One and Stage Three portions of the test, snipers will be required to carry their unloaded sniper rifles in a transport case. For the Functional Strength portion, snipers will need their rifle case as well.

**Testing protocols:** The test is divided into three stages, Movement to Callout, Functional Strength, and Callout Endurance. Each stage will be completed, one at a time. Snipers will be allowed five minutes to rest and prep for the next stage. Failure to start the next stage on time will result in a failure for that stage.

**Scoring:** Based on statistical data collected during six months of control testing, a scoring range has been established. Point values have been assigned. The complete scoring explanation and point value grid is attached.

There are 500 total points available. Snipers will be required to achieve an aggregate score of 375 points (75%) to pass the SFFT. If a sniper demonstrates a weakness in a particular area, he can make up points with a superior performance in another.

**Testing:**

**Stage One – Movement to Callout – Total Distance 200 yards**

This stage is intended to test the sniper’s fitness level against the energy expenditure of executing individual movement skills under stress.

The sniper will stand at the starting line with his rifle in a transport case. On the signal to start, the sniper will sprint 50 yards to Cone #1. He will then drop to his hands and knees and execute a high crawl for 25 yards to Cone #2. Upon reaching the cone, the sniper will drop to the ground and execute a low crawl to Cone #3. The sniper will circle the cone, turning 180 degrees while remaining in contact with the ground, and will then execute 20 pushups. Concluding the pushups, the sniper will execute a low crawl to Cone #2. Reaching that cone, the sniper will rise to his hands and knees and execute a high crawl to Cone #1. Upon reaching the cone, the sniper will rise to his feet and sprint to the finish line. Time stops when the sniper crosses the line.

Low Crawl

Sprint

High Crawl

START

25 Yards

25 Yards

50 Yards

**#1**

**#3**

**#2**

# NOT TO SCALE

**Procedures:**

High crawl is properly executed with the sniper moving forward with six points of contact with the ground. This includes hands, knees, and feet.

Low crawl is properly executed with the sniper moving forward while maintaining full contact with the ground. This includes elbows, knees, feet, and belt buckle.

The turn will be executed while maintaining full contact with the ground.

Minimum Standard: 5:18

**Stage Two – Functional Strength**

This stage is intended to test the sniper’s basic functional strength levels. The tests focus on lifting strength and stamina, core strength and lower body power.

First Phase – Overhead Equipment Lift

This test will be administered using the sniper’s rifle, inside its case. The case will be placed at the sniper’s feet. On the signal to start, the sniper will lift the case from the ground, over his head with arms fully extended, then return to the ground. This counts as one repetition. The sniper will complete as many repetitions as possible in two minutes.

Minimum Standard: 40 lifts

Second Phase – Core Strength

While wearing a T-shirt or BDU top (or flight suit), the sniper will assume “The Plank Position,” and continue to maintain it for as long as possible. The time starts once the sniper is in position and stops as soon as any part of his body other than his forearms and toes make contact with the ground.

Plank Position Procedure:

* 1. Start by lying face down on the ground. Place your elbows and forearms underneath your chest.



* 1. Prop yourself up to form a bridge using your toes and forearms
  2. Maintain a flat back and do not allow your hips to sag towards the ground.

Minimum Standard: 1:18

Third Phase – Standing Broad Jump

While wearing a T-shirt or BDU top (or flight suit), the sniper takes up a position, standing behind the start line. On his initiative, the sniper will execute a standing broad jump forward, as far as he can. The distance of the jump will be measured from the start line to the heels of the sniper upon landing. The sniper will be afforded two jumps, and the longest of the two will be recorded for score.

Standing Broad Jump Procedure:

The sniper stands behind a line marked on the ground with feet slightly apart. A two-foot take-off and landing is used, with swinging of the arms and bending of the knees to provide forward drive. The sniper attempts to jump as far as possible, landing on both feet without falling backwards.

Minimum Standard: 78 inches

**Stage Three – Callout Endurance**

This stage is intended to test the sniper’s current level of stamina and endurance after sustained energy expenditure.

The sniper will run 440 yards (1/4 mile), wearing a full callout uniform, and carrying his rifle in a transport case (soft or hard).

Minimum Standard: 2:41

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# **Designing a Qualification Course**

Training is intended to give you the wide range of skills needed to succeed as a sniper in an operational theater. In training, you should learn the fundamentals of shooting, and its many tactical applications. To quantify the effectiveness of your training program, you must have an applicable qualification course. A qualification course validates the achievement of training standards of your program, as well as providing a measure of the skill level of your snipers. A standardized qualification course is a necessary element of any well-documented sniper program. Every sniper team must have a standardized qualification course that is administered at regular intervals throughout the training year.

Over the years, we have collected and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of qualification courses from around the country. Common weaknesses are the use of static positions, non-anatomical targets, and lack of stress. Another concern is the number of rounds expended in the course. Some of the courses we have sampled have as few as four rounds and as many as sixty. An intelligently designed qualification course needs to be practical, realistic, and legally defensible. Based on our observations and experiences, we offer the following guidelines for designing an effective qualification course for your agency. All of these presuppose you are incorporating these skills into your monthly training schedule.

The qualification course should measure the police sniper’s ability to demonstrate, on demand, the shooting skills he will have to possess to be successful and effective in the field. Those skills include:

* The ability to fire an accurate cold barrel shot under stress \*
* The ability to make proper target identification.
* The ability to shoot accurately at a target in proximity to hostages.
* The ability to shoot accurately from various positions.
* The ability to shoot accurately from a variety of distances.
* The ability and capability to shoot accurately in a range of lighting conditions.
* Safe weapon handling

*\*The level of accuracy considered acceptable with a police sniper rifle is 1 MOA. This is necessary considering the possibility of having hostages or other non-hostile parties close to the person being targeted. Repeatable accuracy of that level will allow the sniper to aim for and hit a cranial vault, meant to instantly incapacitate a human target, or a center mass shot, while allowing for a reasonable margin of error.*

These are skills the courts have established as being expected from those given the right and authority to use deadly force in their law enforcement duties. There is an expectation the officers in question have been trained to perform under a wide variety of real-world conditions and can therefore demonstrate those skills on demand in the form of a qualification course.

To make your qualification course relevant, it must be a realistic gauge of job-related shooting skills. This means those courses that traditionally rely on bullseye groups or silhouette targets don’t fit the bill. A realistic qualification course must incorporate:

**PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STRESS** — Sniper shootings do not occur in perfect, controlled circumstances. They happen in pressure-filled seconds beyond the sniper’s control. Adrenaline dumps cause accelerated heartbeats, increased blood pressure and respiration. The sniper must override the physical and mental effects of stress, then process information, identify targets, gauge distances, plot a safe bullet trajectory, and make an accurate shot. Incorporating physical activity, time constraints and decision making into the qualification course is a realistic necessity.

**HUMAN FACE TARGETS** — Police snipers are not bullseye shooters. While shooting tight five-round groups are great ego builders, they have no real-world application. Bullseye shooting, as well as other deliberate, slow fire exercises are fine for fundamental training and determining the accuracy of your weapon system. However, don’t make them a part of your qualification process. Snipers are trained to kill their human targets. And in the real world, people will present themselves in various positions. Not all bad guys will directly face the sniper. In their qualification course, snipers should demonstrate the ability to shoot accurately at realistic looking, life-sized human targets in different poses and orientations.

**ANATOMICALLY CORRECT SCORING AREAS** — Destroying the central nervous system is the only reliable way to achieve instant incapacitation of a human target. Placing a high velocity projectile in the cranial vault is the best way to accomplish that result. This has been proven both medically and anecdotally in field applications. Scoring areas on qualification targets should reinforce proper practice and skills. A common fault we have seen with some targets is restricting the “scoring area” to a T section around the eyes and nose. Shots outside of this area are considered misses. This reinforces incorrect shot placement, while completely ignoring the physiological effectiveness of the cranial vault area in the forehead above the eyes.

**PARTIALLY EXPOSED AND HOSTAGE TARGETS** — Not all bad guys are going to be so cooperative as to stand out in the open and wait to be shot. They may be partially obscured by doorframes, walls, and hostages. The sniper must demonstrate the ability to shoot accurately at partially exposed targets, without striking hostages in close proximity. The above-mentioned anatomical scoring area is still the standard of success.

**VARIATIONS IN DISTANCE AND SHOOTING POSITIONS** — Our research has shown sniper shootings around the country occur at a wide range of distances, as close as 5 yards, and as distant as 200 yards. The snipers themselves have had to employ a variety of shooting positions, both classic and improvised. It is not only realistic, but reasonable that the qualification course should incorporate various positions and randomly selected distances. Avoid the practice of always conducting qualifications from exactly 100 yards in a prone bipod position.

**MOVING TARGETS** – In a real-world situation, it is highly likely your target is going to be in motion. Therefore, it is imperative moving targets are incorporated into your regular training schedule. If you have the facilities, this should be done every month, and included in some stage in the qualification course. If you do not, at the very least, moving targets need to be a part of the annual training schedule, even if this means making special arrangements for a range or equipment.

**Additional Elements** - Qualification courses should be shot while wearing full callout attire. After all, that’s what the sniper will be wearing when he must shoot for real. This shouldn’t be a big adjustment, especially if your training is conducted while wearing full callout attire. They should also be done year-round, in the range of seasonal weather conditions in which you will operate.

The daylight qualification courses should also be conducted in low light conditions. If you do not have night vision capabilities, then shoot in ambient light. This will give you an idea of what your limitations are, and hopefully inspire tactics to deal with low light.

If you have night vision, then you should shoot a qualification course utilizing that equipment. The course should incorporate removing the device from its case, mounting, and then activating it on the sniper’s rifle, while in total darkness. This will simulate the operating conditions he might face. If IR illuminators are to be used by the team, they should also be included in the course. Modifications may have to be made to the targets used. Night vision devices do not work well with standard two-dimensional paper targets. Much of the photographic detail is washed out. The night vision course may have to utilize three-dimensional targets like mannequin heads, or steel targets. Precision and accuracy can be tested on paper targets with a clear contrasting scoring zone.

There are a limited number of standardized sniper qualification courses which meet the above criteria. We strongly recommend your agency either adopt one of them or design your own following these parameters. This will keep you within the “industry standards,” and further protect your agency from future litigation as it relates to training and qualification.

**References**

National Tactical Officers Tactical Response Operations Standards

Police Sniper Training and Operations Manual – 2nd Edition

Police Sniper Utilization Survey Reports, 2005 – 2025 Editions