

The following article first appeared in the official Austrian military publication called TRUPPENDIENST (Troop Service) in the year 1967 and was written by an Austrian Army Officer, Captain Hans Widhofner. Among persons questioned were the two most proficient German snipers of the war with the comments of another good sniper added to obtain a well-rounded picture concerning the use of snipers in the German army.

Questions asked of the Snipers

Widhofner questioned three seasoned snipers individually. They are designated in the order A, B and C. All three were members of the Third Mountain Division of the former German Army. With respect to their person please note the following:

A. Matthäus Hetzenauer of Tyrol fought at the Eastern Front from 1943 to the end of the war, and with 345 certified hits is the most successful German sniper.

B. Sepp Allerberg of Salzburg fought at the Eastern Front from December 1942, to the end of the war, and with 257 certified hits is the second-best German sniper.

C. Helmut Wirnsberger of Styria fought at the Eastern Front from September 1942, to the end of the war and scored 64 certified hits (after being wounded he served for some time as instructor on a sniper training course).

1. Weapons used?

A. K98 with six-power telescopic sights. G43 with four-power telescopic sights.

B. Captured Russian sniper rifle with telescopic sight; I cannot remember power. K98 with six-power telescopic sights.

C. K98 with 1.5-power sights. K98 with four-power telescopic sights. G43 with four-power telescopic sights.

2. Telescopic sights used?

A. Four-power telescopic sight was sufficient up to a range of approximately 400 meters, Six-power telescopic sight was good up to 1,000 meters.

B. Used for two years a captured Russian rifle with telescopic sight; yielded good results, Six-power telescopic sight mounted on K98 was good.

C. 1.5-power telescopic sight was not sufficient; four-power telescopic sight was sufficient and proved good.

3. What is your opinion on increasing the magnification of your telescopic sights?

A. & B. Six-power was sufficient. There was no need for stronger scope. No experience with greater magnification.

C. Four-power is sufficient in both cases.

4. At what range could you hit the following targets without fail?

A. Head up to 400 meters. Breast up to 600 meters. Standing Man up to 700-800 meters.

B. Head up to 400 meters. Breast up to 400 meters. Standing up to 600 meters.

C. Head up to 400 meters. Breast up to 400 meters. Standing Man up to 600 meters.

5. Do the ranges indicated by you apply only to you, i.e. the best snipers, or also to the majority of snipers?

A. & B. Only to the best snipers.

C. To me personally as well as to the majority of snipers. A few outstanding snipers could hit also at longer ranges.

B added: Absolutely positive hitting is possible only up to about 600 meters.

6. What was the range of the furthest target you ever fired at, and what kind of target, size?

A. About 1,000 meters. Standing soldier. Positive hitting not possible, but necessary under the circumstances in order to show enemy that he is not safe even at that distance! Or superior wanted to satisfy himself about capability.

B. 400 to 700 meters.

C. About 600 meters, rarely more. I usually waited until target approached further for better chance of hitting. Also confirmation of successful hit was easier. Used G43 only to about 500 meters because of poor ballistics.

7. How many second shots / Additional shots were necessary per ten hits?

A. Almost never.

B. One to two. Second shot is very dangerous when enemy snipers are in the area.

C. One to two at the most.

8. If you had a choice, what weapon would you use and why?

A. K98. Of all weapons available at that time it had the highest accuracy for permanent use, besides it did not jam easily. G43 was only suitable to about 400 meters. It also had inferior precision.

B. K98 was best. The G43 was too heavy.

C. The G43 would be good if it did not jam easily and its capacity was as good as K98.

9. Today if you had the choice between the K98 and a semi-automatic rifle that does not easily jam and has the same capacity as the K98, which weapon would you take and why?

A. Snipers do not need a semi-automatic weapon if they are correctly used as snipers.

B. Semi-automatic loader, if its weight does not increase.

C. Semi-automatic loader. Faster firing possible when attacked by the enemy.

10. Were you incorporated into a troop unit?

All three belonged to the sniper group of the battalion. C was the commander of this group. They numbered up to 22 men; six of them usually stayed with battalion, the rest were assigned to the companies. Observations and use of ammunition as well as successful hits had to be reported daily to the battalion staff. In the beginning, the snipers were called up out of the battalion, as the war continued and the number of highly-skilled snipers decreased, they were often assigned and given their orders by the division. In addition, a few marksmen in each company were equipped with telescopic sights. These men did not have special training but were able to hit accurately up to about 400 meters and carried out a great deal of the work to be done by "actual snipers". These specially equipped riflemen served in the company as regular soldiers. This is why they could not achieve such high scores as the "snipers".

11. Strategy and Targets?

a. Attack:

A, B, C, Always two snipers at a time; one shoots, the other spots. Usual general order:- Elimination of observers, of the enemy's heavy weapons and of commanders, or special order, when all important or worthwhile targets were eliminated; for example! Anti-tank gun positions, machine gun positions. Etc. Snipers followed closely the attacking units and whenever necessary. Eliminated enemies who operated. Heavy weapons and those who were dangerous to our advance.

A added: In a few cases, I had to penetrate the enemies main line of resistance at night before our own attack. When our own artillery had opened fire. I had to shoot at enemy commanders and gunners because our own forces would have been too weak in number and ammunition without this support.

B. Attack during night:

A, B, C, As far as we can remember, no major attacks during night were conducted, snipers were not used at night; they were too valuable.

C. Winter attacks:

A. Clothed in winter camouflage I followed behind the front units. When the attack slowed down had to help by engaging machine gunners and Anti tank guns etc.

B, C, Good camouflage and protection against cold was necessary. No extensive ambushing possible.

b. Defense:

A, B, C, Usually on my own within company detachment; order fire at any target or only worthwhile targets. Great success during enemy attacks since commanders can often be recognized and shot at long range due to their special clothing and gear such as belts crossed on chest, white camouflage in winter, etc. As a consequence, enemy's attack was prevented in most cases. Shot the respective leaders of enemy's attack eight times during one attack. As soon as enemy snipers appeared we fought them until they were eliminated; we also suffered great losses. As a rule, the sniper watched for worthwhile targets at the break of dawn and remained in position until dusk with few interruptions. We were often in position in front of our own lines in order to fight the enemy more successfully. When enemy knew our position, we were forced to remain without provisions or reinforcements at such advanced position. During alarm or enemy attack, a good sniper did not shoot at just any target, but only at the most important ones such as commanders, gunners, etc.

e. Defense during night:

A, B, C, Snipers not used during night; not even assigned to guard duty or other duties. If necessary he had to take position in front of own lines in order to fight the enemy more effectively during the day.

12. Did you score successful hits by moonlight?

A. I was often called to action when there was sufficient moonlight since reasonably accurate hitting is possible with a six-power telescopic sight, but not with point and rear sight.

B. C. No.

g. Delaying action:

A, C, In most cases four to six snipers were ordered to rear guard and eliminate any enemy appearing; very good results. Use machine guns for rear guard only in emergencies since snipers delayed enemy's advance by one or two hits without easily revealing his own position.

B. No actual use of snipers, actual sniping not possible in mobile warfare since anybody shoots at appearing enemy.

12. In what warfare could the sniper be most successful?

A. The best success for snipers did not reside in the number of hits, but in the damage caused the enemy by shooting commanders or other important men. As to the merit of individual hits, the snipers best results could be obtained in defense since the target could be best recognized with respect to merit by careful observation. Also with

respect the numbers, best results could be obtained in defense since the enemy attacked several times during a the day.

B. Defense. Other hits were not certified.

C. Best results during extended positional warfare and during enemy attacks; good results also during delaying action.

13. Percentage of successful hits at various ranges?

Up to 400 meters A. 65 percent C. 80 percent

Up to 600 meters A. 30 percent C. 20 percent

Additional information: A. This is why about 65 percent of my successful hits were made below 400 meters.

B. Do not remember. Mass of hits were below the range of 600 meters.

C. Shot mainly within range of 400 meters due to great possibility of successful hit. Beyond this limit hits could not be confirmed without difficulty.

14. Do these percentages and ranges apply to you personally or are they valid for the majority of snipers?

A. This information is applicable to the majority of snipers as well as to the best snipers, for: the majority of snipers could hit with absolute certainty only within a range of 400 meters due to their limited skills, the best snipers could hit with reasonable certainty at longer ranges; they in most cases, however, waited until enemy was closer or approaching the enemy in order to better choose the target with respect to its merit.

B. Information is applicable to all snipers known to me in person.

C. Information is applicable to myself as well as to the majority of snipers.

15. On the average, how many shots were fired from one position ?

a. Attack:

A, B, C. As many as necessary.

b. Defence from secure position:

A, B, C, One to three at most.

c. Enemy attack:

A, B, C, Depending on worthwhile targets.

d. Combat against enemy snipers:

A, B, C, One to two at most.

e. Delaying action:

A, B, C, One to two was sufficient since sniper was not alone.

B added: During own attack as well as enemy's attack, hits were not confirmed.

16. What else is especially important in addition to excellent marksmanship?

A: Besides the generally known quality of a sniper it is especially important to be able to outwit the enemy. The better "Tactician at detail" wins in combat against enemy snipers. The exemption from commitment to any other duties contributes essentially to the achievement of high scores.

B. Calmness, good judgment courage.

C. Patience and Perseverance, excellent sense of observation.

17. From what group of persons were snipers selected?

A. Only people born for individual fighting such as hunters, even poachers, forest rangers, etc without taking into consideration their time of service.

B. Do not remember. I had scored 27 successful hits with Russian sniper rifle before I was ordered to participate in sniper training course.

C. Only soldiers with experience at the front who were excellent riflemen; usually after second year of service; had to comply with various shooting requirements to be accepted in the sniper training courses.

18. In what sniper training courses did you participate?

A, B, C: Sniper courses at the training area Seetaleralpe.

C. I was later assigned to the same course as an instructor.

19. Was it advisable to equip the sniper with a double telescope? What magnification did the double telescope have?

A. 6 x 30 enlargement was insufficient for longer distances. Later I had a 10 x 50 telescope which was satisfactory.

B. Double telescope was equally important as rifle. No further information.

C. Every sniper was equipped with a double telescope. This was useful and necessary. An enlargement of 6 x 30 was sufficient up to a range of about 500 meters.

20. Would you prefer a periscope which allows observation under full cover?

A. Was very useful as supplement (Russian trench telescope).

B. No.

C. Was used when captured.

21. Were scissor stereo telescopes (positional warfare) used?

A, C. Yes, when available. Was used mutually by sniper and artillery observer.

B. No.

22. What type of camouflage was used?

A,B,C. I have never used a fake tree stump, but I have used camouflage clothing. Camouflage of my face and hands and camouflage of my weapon in winter. (White cover, white wrapping, white paint)

B added: For two years I used an umbrella which was painted to match the terrain. In the beginning I always camouflaged face and hands well. Later on, less often.

23. Did you use technical means to mislead the enemy?

A. Yes, stuffed dummies, etc.

B. Yes; for example, dummy position with installed carbines which could be fired by means of a wirepull.

C. No.

24. Did you use protective shields in positional warfare?

A, B, C. No.

25. What is your opinion on the use of tracer ammunition?

A, B, C. If possible, they should not be used at all in combat since they have easily revealed the position of the sniper. Tracer ammunition was mainly used for practice shooting as well as ranging at various distances. For this purpose every sniper carried with him a few tracer cartridges.

26. Did you use observation ammunition, i.e. cartridges that fired projectiles, which detonate upon impact?

A, B, C. Yes; upon impact a small flame as well as a small puff of smoke could be seen which allowed good observation of impact. By this method we could force the enemy to leave wooden houses, etc by setting fire to them.

Observation cartridges were used up to a range of about 600 meters; their dispersion was somewhat larger than that of heavy pointed cartridges (heavy pointed bullet).

27. How did you overcome side wind?

A. By my own judgment and experience. When necessary, I used tracer ammunition to determine wind drift. I was well prepared for side wind by my training at Seetaleralpe where we practiced often in strong winds.

B. By own judgment. We did not shoot when side wind was too heavy.

C. No explanation since snipers do not shoot with strong winds.

28. Can you recall the rules pertaining to your behavior when shooting at moving targets?

A, B, C: No; importance is own judgment and experience as well as fast aiming and fast firing.

29. Do you have any experience with armor piercing rifles?

A. Yes, several times I have fought against a "machine-gunner with a protective shield". I could hit small targets only up to 300 meters since dispersion was considerably larger than with K98. Besides, it was very heavy and clumsy and was not suitable as a sniper weapon. I did not use it against unarmored targets.

B, C. No.

30. What was the method by which your hits were certified?

A, B, C, By observation and confirmation by an officer, non-commissioned officer or two soldiers. This is why the number of certified hits is smaller than the actual score.