



# Inside SFSC

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## New-school technology meets old-school techniques at Special Forces Sniper Course

A student attending the Special Forces Sniper Course moves quietly while avoiding detection during a stalking exercise Jan. 27 on Fort Bragg, N.C. Students of the 8-week course practice marksmanship, fieldcraft, and communication techniques. The SFSC is taught by the cadre of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne). (Photo by Sgt. David William McLean, 22nd MPAD)

By **Sgt. David William McLean**  
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Eyes are fixed in the near horizon, scanning and searching for strange activities or patterns in the scattered underbrush of the pine forest. Spotting scopes spin from one direction to another looking for a reflection from a barrel or an ill-advised movement of one of the students of the Special Forces Sniper Course at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Sgt. 1st Class Gabriel Kessay, the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the stalking exercise, calls out on a radio, "Freeze," as he guides a fellow instructor to the location of the silent pursuer.

Today, this student has been caught; but the only thing he loses is some of his free time on Saturday for additional practice. If this had been the real thing, he could have lost his life.

The Army's most advanced snipers perfect their abilities and refine their skills in the classrooms and ranges of the SFSC. For eight weeks, students learn technical equipment use, fieldcraft, tactics and methods in order to become a sensor who can detect, verify and shoot. The instructors teach techniques used by the earliest marksmen, coupled with the newest technology to make the silent-but-deadly force more accurate, agile and effective on the battlefield.

Ghillie suits, infused with vegetation found in the sniper's immediate area, help to break up the silhouette as he creeps forward to observe and potentially eliminate a target.

Kessay said he has seen a general decline in Soldiers' fieldcraft skills due to the high tempo of operations overseas in desert terrain, but the skill set is of critical importance to a sniper.

"[Fieldcraft] is just as important as shooting, because if I can't find and fix the enemy, I don't get to take that shot," Kessay said. "The stalk is a good way of teaching them to find those target indicators or locate the observation position. They also use those target indicators in a reverse effect to hide themselves or to better blend."

Students practice the stalk both in wooded and urban environments to cover a broad range of conditions they may encounter in the field. The rules move them closer to a target than they would normally be, but success at this range makes them perfect their craft.

Upgrades to the sniper's kit in the past few years have enhanced their weapons, ammunition and communication. To perfect their marksmanship, the sniper has a new tool in his bag besides the old log book: a personal data assistant with an advanced ballistics software program.

"It has all the gun data, atmospheric, temperature, barometric pressure, humidity and the target information," said Master Sgt. Kevin P. Owens, a senior instructor for SFSC. "From that, it gives them a shooting solution, and they dial it into the gun and shoot."

"We're dialed in at 1,000 meters hitting a 4-inch

clay pigeon," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Bode, a student at the SFSC. "You can't do that without a whole lot of data collection on the old system. I can do in a split second what we used to have to collect data for years on a gun before we had that information."

While the speed of the new system helps to make corrections quickly, there is still information the sniper has to apply to the shooting formula before sending the round on target.

"The only thing the PDA does not do is account for wind," Owens said. "The students do a wind formula in their head watching the grass or other factors in the scope. It is all very skillful, but reading the wind is the hardest part."

The skills he is learning with and without the technology will make him more effective, Bode said.

"Once we get the fundamentals of marksmanship down, they are teaching us wind culls, how to read the mirage and how to know which direction and velocity the wind is coming in," Bode said.

"This is all to see how it is going to play on the bullet. There is little on the battlefield more demoralizing than an effective sniper in an effective position."

The training, skill and determination of the Soldiers who pass through the SFSC make the newest crop of Special Forces snipers a lethal combination of new and old school anywhere in the world.

**"There is little on the battlefield more demoralizing than an effective sniper in an effective position."**

**Sgt. 1st Class Robert Bode**  
Special Forces Sniper Course student

# Special-operations community loses urban training icon

By John Humphreys

Instructor, SF Advanced Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Exploitation Techniques Course

This is a short story about a man who directly contributed to the advent of formal urban warfare training for Special Forces more than anyone else.



Stevens

It's a story about a man of humble beginnings, who joined the Army right after high school to avoid the West Virginia coal mines that killed his father.

Lowell Stevens' father fought in World War II; young Lowell Stevens was in awe of the military and drawn by the possibility of adventure in foreign lands.

Stevens joined the Army in 1959 as a paratrooper, volunteering for Special Forces training in 1963. Upon completion, he was assigned to 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Okinawa, Japan.

While at Okinawa, Stevens took his first trip to Vietnam for six months in 1964. Then, in 1965, he was transferred to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Vietnam, thus beginning a tour that lasted 71 months, ending in 1972.

In Vietnam, Stevens served in several A-camps, taught at the Military Assistance Command—Vietnam Recondo School, and flew as the covery rider for recon teams in Laos and Cambodia.

Back at Fort Bragg, Stevens helped design and build a 5th SFG(A) range on McPherson Impact Area. He built flat ranges, shoot-houses, a vertical assault tower and other training apparatus with virtually no funding or resources.

This range was the first pure urban warfare course for Special Forces. Stevens was selected to be the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of this special-operations training program.

Over the next several years, Stevens designed the first ballistic shoot-house built of tires filled with sand and stacked to form walls. Within two years, every Army post had one of Stevens' tire houses constructed for urban warfare training. He was constantly innovating new methods of training without getting people hurt or spending a fortune.

The SOT course evolved into the Special Forces Advanced Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Exploitation Techniques Course for the purpose of training selected Special Forces units to conduct precise urban warfare.

More than anyone else, Stevens contributed directly to the program's success and to the ability of Special Forces to fight and win in this environment. When he was invited out to Range 37 for a live-fire demonstration and facility tour in 2007, he was visibly moved to see how far his ideas had come.

Stevens once said that his service in Vietnam and his time at Camp Mackall defined his life. He took great satisfaction in his accomplishments in, and in support of, the military.

Last month, Stevens passed away at 70 years of age. He will be missed by all who knew him, and those who did not should be told of his unique accomplishments.

## SWCS Cadre Profile



### Sgt. 1st Class Chance Giannelli

Instructor, Special Forces Sniper Course

When Army special operators report to the 8-week Special Forces Sniper Course, they know they're going to get some high-quality training. But do they know they'll be receiving instruction from the 2010 International Sniper Competition world-champion? Probably not, because Giannelli is a modest guy, but you better believe his expertise shines through in the course. Want to know more? Read on!

#### On keeping his skills current:

"When you're an instructor, you need to have the opportunity, and time, to attend the most up-to-date training. We make time for that so we can stay on top of our skills. Personal development takes a lot of passion and dedication. A lot of the other instructors come in on Saturdays to shoot and train. We all shoot at pistol competitions and two- and three-gun competitions."

#### On the sniper course's development since attending as a student in 2007:

"We've grown from a seven-week course to an eight-week course. When I went through, we did two night shoots. Now there are 17 night shoots. This is not like it was five years ago. Most of us come in around 7 a.m. and finish around 6 p.m., then three nights a week you'll pick up night shoots from 7 p.m. to midnight. I work way more in the past two years than I have in my last 10 years in the military."

#### On bringing operational experience to the course:

"In 2005, we were doing a lot of urban special-operations missions. Not to get away from the rural missions, because that's still very important, but we're bringing in more urban lessons; like what to look for and how to set up hide sights."

#### On teaching old dogs new tricks:

"I like seeing the development of the young shooters. I prefer getting the ones that don't have any experience as a long-distance shooter; I can see them develop into more complete shooters. Sometimes when you get the more seasoned guys they've already developed bad habits and it's harder to break those bad habits."

#### On the rewards of a job-well-done:

"I like being able to see the final outcome; our last class graduated 100 percent, so that was very rewarding."



Sgt. 1st Class Chance Giannelli, left, and his teammate Sgt. 1st Class Edward Homeyer, rest between events at the 2010 International Sniper Competition last October at Fort Benning, Ga. Together, the duo out-shot 31 other elite sniper teams.

## Upcoming Events

| Sunday | Monday         | Tuesday  | Wednesday | Thursday   | Friday           | Saturday |
|--------|----------------|--|-----------|--|------------------|----------|
| 6      | 7              | 8  | 9         | 10   | 11               | 12       |
| 13     | 14             | BRAC Briefing and Civilian of the Quarter Recognition Ceremony 10:30 a.m. JFK Auditorium | 16        | CA and MISO AIT Graduation 10 a.m. JFK Auditorium                      | Training Holiday | 19       |
| 20     | Presidents Day | 22   | 23        | Special Forces Section Leader Course Graduation 11 a.m. JFK Auditorium | 25               | 26       |