

An excerpt from the fall 2005 edition of the journal of Counter Terrorism titled Counter Terrorism & Security Tools #3, by: JM Peterson – A former Special Forces Weapons Sergeant.

No mistake about it, this gear was "used for real." Equipment featured in this series does not get to grace the pages of this fine publication unless it worked. We are not a trade magazine that needs to worry about making certain companies happy, so the report I am giving is based upon my personal experience, both in training and operations. I continue to glean feedback from personnel currently in or just returning from operations on what works and what does not for tactical tools. Needless to say, real-world "R&D" is at an all time high. I will detail some of the best gear that I have ever come across, and that I have also gotten to use operationally and highly recommend, from 5 different companies.

A modern sniper kit that works / Operationally proven

Center Mass

Mini-Sharpshooter Rifle Rest # 1

The first item of gear I will write of was one that years ago I was skeptical about, but that skepticism is all gone. It is also the largest piece of gear, other than a weapon, that I have carried on a mission. Although snipers are taught various shooting positions and how to use slings, when it comes right down to it, stability of the weapon is just about the most important fundamental.

Having had an extensive amount of training in "position shooting" as well as having been an instructor to snipers, this along with the issue of having to pack in a larger, heavier item on an operation makes a lot of us initially doubt a piece of gear.

Some snipers construct expedient or homemade devices for shooting from. This works some of the time, and what many end up doing is having to carry multiple devices with them on an operation. There are a number of products and attachments for sniper rifles on the market to help get more stable when shooting. My advice is to have multiple devices, as you can never really predict how or where you are going to shoot from, but I would add caution, in that you had better train thoroughly with such items before taking them on an operation.

Centermass of Michigan developed a patented series of rifle rests based on a lessons learned of a real police sniper shooting, as well as the obvious need for such a device showing itself operationally all over. Centermass makes two different sizes of rifle rest, using the highest quality tripods from Bogen. These are the same ones used by professional photographers and news cameramen. The tripods are topped by their own proprietary rifle cradles and accessories. The components of the rest or cradle portion of the devices can be purchased separately from Centermass, but the author recommends against using flimsy aluminum camcorder and camera tripods sold in camera stores for professional weapons or reconnaissance use. These mounts allow the sniper to not only stabilize the weapon, but allow it to traverse rapidly when following a moving target, and be able to rapidly elevate or depress the muzzle. Very important to this process is that the tripods are stable enough to handle both this action plus recoil.

Speed can be a real factor, as the sniper may only have a limited opportunity to shoot, so this means getting setup and getting stable as quickly as possible. With some other expedient methods or devices this is not as quick, I found, as compared to using the sharpshooters rests from Centermass. The tripods can hold the 40 or more pounds of weight and are the most high quality and versatile made. Another benefit of the tripod is that it allows you to hold the rifle or other optical device (camera, laser range finder, spotting scope) for hours on end with no fatigue. If stability is an issue (for lasing or photography), these tripods were made for this. What a tripod device such as this does, versus using natural or available material for support, is have consistency every time you set up. If a sniper setting up an urban hide in a house depends upon using different types of furniture and house wares to build up a perch or rest, then there is no consistency from

one operation to the next. This is not to mention the fact that they may not find anything at all to use for support. Considering how high you may have to set up in a room to get the proper angle of fire, some type of means is often needed to elevate the rifle.

Speaking of how high a sniper might have to be. Based on map analysis and study of aerial photos, I was quite sure that we would be setting up on a mountainside, the steeper the better. There would be no way to guarantee a stable platform from which to shoot from or use our optics and cameras from, and we were certainly going to be facing our objective area at extreme angles. Shooting from a high angle can be a major variable in a sniper's mission, not just due to a possible ballistic change, but even more so in attaining and holding a stable and repeatable shooting position. Another reason for needing this device in this environment was not just for shooting. A sniper may have to rollover into a Direct Action or "DA" mission, meaning they may have to support another follow-on operation, such as call in an air strike, or "terminal guidance operations (TOO). This could consist of using a laser target designator (LTD) from several thousand meters away. Photographic reconnaissance, especially now with digital photography, requires absolute stability of the system when having to surveil at the distances that we had to (often 1,000-5,000 meters up about 3 miles away). This rifle rest allowed us to easily mount our digital camcorders, laser range finders, spotting scopes, and binoculars onto it for the needed stability of continuous surveillance over a period of days.

The smaller of two rifle rests made by Center-mass went into my mountain pack. It is about 24" long when closed and less than 5 pounds in weight, but those two statistics can mean a lot when having to haul it in extremely rugged mountain terrain in the 8-12,000 feet altitude range. I spent so much time detailing this product because when it comes down to size, weight, and application, it all has to fit into your gear vest and pack and it all has to be feasible to carry on the operation. If that operation involves a lot of walking, especially in the most severe of locales, a lot of consideration has to be given about what goes and what does not. The result: I am sure glad that I brought this piece of gear with me.

Centermass also sells a series of products for snipers, most of which I used over there, to include ammunition holders, cheek pieces, 3 different types of sniper data books, an angle determination device for snipers, the quick cuff sling, a moving target system, and a host of other items. If they don't invent a given item, they find it on the market and become a distributor for it, and in many cases they are the sole distributor.

I try to get to know the people who make the gear whenever I can. The owner of Centermass and inventor of the rifle rests as well as several other products is Officer Jeff Felts. He has extensive experience as a SWAT sniper, SWAT team member and leader, instructor, and street cop. He has a bit of military background as well. I have had a chance to work directly for him during contract training courses and along side he and his staff at training conferences, and he and his staff get my highest marks ever for dedication, quality, and service.

His company is a perfect example of a great hybrid of products and training services for real world needs. But what stands out about Jeff Felts is his constant pursuit of perfection as innovator, inventor, and instructor. This shows in his products. He won't sell something if its "space junk" or not up to snuff, as he knows that people's lives depend on this gear and he himself, as a career law enforcement officer and tactical operator has a stake in this as well. Some of the best companies in the business are run by, or heavily advised by, currently serving personnel. (Blackhills Ammunition, Surefire tactical lights, etc.) He and his company are now in the final stages of perfecting a rifle rest device specifically designed for helicopter sniping, and this device has already been "field tested" in Iraq.