

'Nobody enjoys this' says woman sniper

By Terry Leonard
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — Arrow has lost track of the number of men she has killed. But the only woman on an elite Bosnian sniper team says she finds it difficult to pull the trigger, to deal with seeing death through a telescopic sight.

"I try not to think about it. I try to cut myself off from my feelings," said the 20-year-old, who goes by the code name "Strijela," or Arrow, to protect her identity and her family.

"I never thought something like this could happen to me," she said. "I never thought I could do what I'm doing."

Three months ago Arrow, who has auburn hair and dark eyes, was a student at Sarajevo University. Now she lies in wait each day in a sniper's perch, spending up to 12 hours picking a target, usually a sniper on the Serbian side.

Her target must be in uniform and must be carrying a gun.

"Very often we get very close," said Arrow. "When I shoot, I see what I did. It is very personal. I don't know how this will affect me later."

She said most of her targets are snipers, but sometimes she is asked to eliminate a machine-gun nest or lay down

covering fire for advancing Bosnian soldiers.

"It's not easy. Nobody enjoys this," she said, interviewed yesterday in a safe house where she sleeps.

Arrow is also a Serb killing Serbs, one of an unknown number who have put loyalty to their besieged city over their nationalist allegiances. Most of her fellow fighters with the Bosnian territorial defence unit are Muslim and Croat.

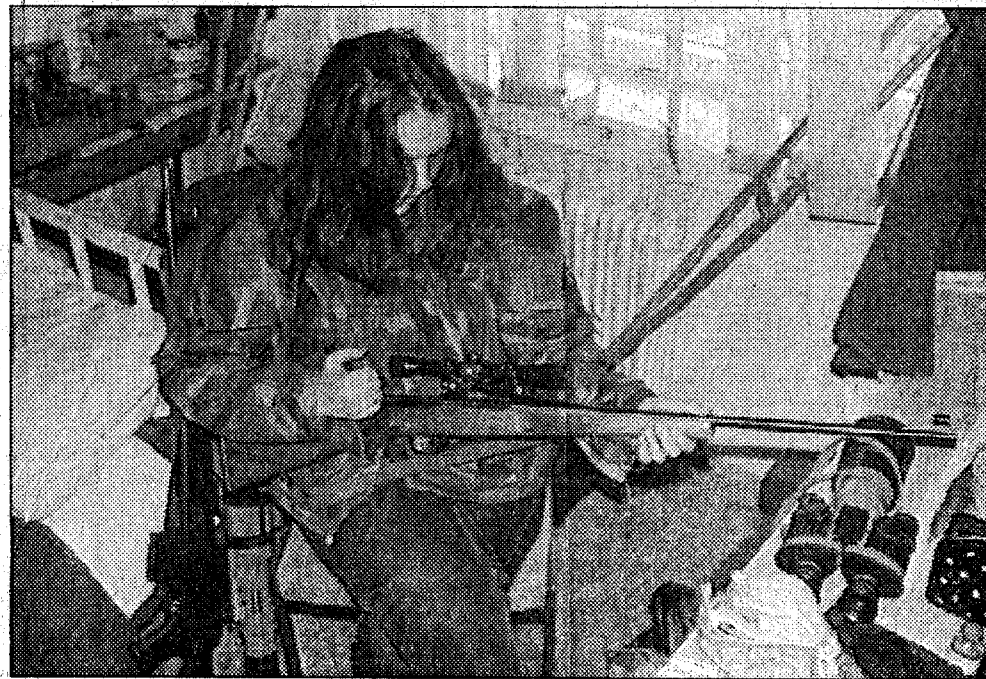
"This is the only town I have, the only town in my life. I feel a responsibility to defend it," she said.

The sniper team's commander, a 40-year-old former businessman who uses the code name "Dzings," said he is the only member who has killed more enemy snipers than Arrow. He claims to have killed 67.

Dzings said his unit has fewer than 50 members, and only four are good enough to specialize in shooting snipers.

"Not one of us is a professional soldier," said Dzings. "Not one of us would be here if this war was just another soldier-against-soldier battle. This war pits citizens against soldiers and bandits."

"We all try to cut off our emotions. We are afraid we will end up in some kind of hospital or mental ward when the war ends."



DEADLY OCCUPATION: A 20-year-old Bosnian known as 'Arrow' loads her rifle to prepare for a new round of sniping in Sarajevo yesterday. She has lost count of the number of people she's killed.

"On the first day of the war about 10 of us were walking, singing, marching to join a group of demonstrators across the bridge at Parliament," she said.

"Then from behind a building this man jumped out, fully armed, and began to shoot. I couldn't believe a man could jump out and shoot at people just walking and singing."

Arrow said she immediately volunteered to help defend the city, asking to be a sniper because she used to be a competitive shooter.

"I used to be all alone in silence with a paper target," she said. "Now sometimes I'm in a noisy place with a living target before me. It's not easy to pull the trigger."

"But the way I look at it is, if I do not pull the trigger, the target will pull his trigger, and maybe he'll kill a child or somebody standing in line for bread."

Arrow longs for peace.

"My dream is just to live a normal life, to spend a day just being bored," she said.