



Crosshairs on the Kill Zone: American Combat Snipers, Vietnam through Operation Iraqi Freedom

By Charles W. Sasser, Craig Roberts

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From the authors of the classic sniper chronicle *One Shot-One Kill* comes a new generation of true tales from some of the most expert and deadly marksmen in the world. Meet Adelbert Waldron II, whose 109 confirmed kills in Vietnam made him the most successful sniper in American military history, and Tom "Moose" Ferran, who coined the term "Fetch!", whereupon the infantry would retrieve the sniper's dead quarry. Also included are stories from snipers in Beirut, the Bosnian conflict, and both wars with Iraq -- including the feat of Sergeants Joshua Hamblin and Owen Mulder, who took down thirty-two enemy soldiers in a single day outside Baghdad in 2003.

The military sniper has evolved into one of the most dangerous and highly-skilled warrior professions. They suffer through weather, terrain, and enemy action, lay unmoving for days on end, and take out their targets with unerring accuracy -- proving that the deadliest weapon in any battle, anywhere in the world, is a single well-aimed shot.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Charles W. Sasser has been a full-time freelance writer, journalist, and photographer since 1979. He is a veteran of both the U.S. Navy (journalist) and U.S. Army (Special Forces, the Green Berets), a combat veteran and former combat correspondent wounded in action. He also served fourteen years as a police officer (in Miami, Florida, and in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he was a homicide detective). He is author, co-author or contributing author of more than 30 books and novels, including *One Shot-One Kill* and *Hill 488*, both available from Pocket Books. Sasser now lives on a ranch in Chouteau, Oklahoma, with his wife Donna.

Craig Roberts retired from the armed forces in 1999 with 30 years total service. He was awarded ten decorations for his Marine Corps service in Vietnam, where he served as a Marine sniper. He was also a career police officer with the Tulsa, Oklahoma, police department. An internationally published writer, he is the author of *Combat Medic-Vietnam* and *Police Sniper*, as well as the co-author of *One Shot-One Kill*, and *The Walking Dead*.

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CHAPTER ONE: U.S. Marine Corporal Greg Kraljev, Vietnam, 1969

Some days I killed someone, some days I didn't. I worked a lot with Bravo Company out of the 5th Marine base at An Hoa. Captain Castagneti was the CO. A great commander, a great Marine. His outfit did very little sitting around on their butts killing time while the gooks killed them. Bravo, unlike many other companies, moved around a lot at night. Charlie rarely expected to see a Marine before daylight. The captain put us into positions and situations where we inflicted some real hurt on the enemy.

In late September, Jolly Green Giant CH-53 helicopters jinked Bravo up into the mountains on a battalion search-and-destroy. It was getting toward winter in the tropics, the air was clear and not too hot at night, and there was little rain. Not bad weather for fighting a war.

The operation to flush the VC out of their hiding places -- find him, fix him, and frag him over -- continued for about thirty days. Toward the end of the period, Bravo was humping to the top of a mountain ridge, driving up out of one forested valley and over the mountain into the next valley, when the battalion point element ran into a real shitstorm. Captain Castagneti called for "snipers up."

My spotter Jim Seely and I chugged up to the head of the column. We sprawled out on the ridge summit among some boulders and scabby trees and peered down into a low spot in the valley choked with jungle growth. The foliage screened from sight what was going on down there, but from the sound of things there was a badass fight, a real slugfest. Mixed AK-47 and M16 fire raged at a feverish pitch, rolling together like a thunderstorm.

If events followed the normal script, it wouldn't be long before the guerrillas broke and ran. A ravine gouging its way out of the valley and up the side of the opposite mountain appeared to offer a perfect escape route. The range was about 700 yards, but I would be shooting across a valley from one high point to the next, which made the shooting a bit tricky. I pointed the ravine out to Jim. He nodded.

The gooks lasted longer in the fight than I expected. Sounds of the battle below surged and ebbed for nearly a half hour. Then, sure enough, Jim spotted movement flashes as two figures in black pj's pulled out of the scrap and hauled ass up the ravine, climbing it like a pair of cockroaches caught in a sink when the light comes on. Did I know Charlie or what?

Seely's binoculars afforded him a much wider range of view than my rifle scope. He called the action. "Okay, Greg....There's five or six more directly below those two. Range, what? About six? They'll be busting out in the open in that patch of weeds...."

"I'm on 'em, Jim....Call my shot. I'm going for number one in the larger group."

It was challenging all right. Not only was I shooting across the valley, but these guys were carrying the mail, letting no grass grow beneath their feet, darting and dodging through the underbrush like ol' Satan was on their butts with a fiery pitchfork. I trailed the lead man with my scope, holding the crosshairs at about the nape of his neck. The angle of shot was down from my high point and across the lowlands.

I squeezed off and came back out of recoil.

"About a foot to the right...a little low...," Jim intoned.

I bolted in a fresh round, caught the target in my scope a second time and adjusted my aim. This time I didn't miss.

"He's down," Seely calmly reported, although the adrenaline must have been pumping as hard in his veins as in mine.

I managed to drop two before the rest escaped. It wasn't a bad morning's work, considering the conditions. Even under Captain Castagneti, a turkey shoot like that occurred only now and then. Most of the time, Jim and I had to bust our asses for a good kill.

The way it generally worked, I went out on a patrol and dropped off somewhere to hide and wait in ambush. There was me, a spotter -- usually Jim Seely -- and a third Marine to work the radio. Radiomen were volunteers from the company. A few of them were always wanting to go out with snipers for the experience. Few ever went out a second time. It was simply too scary, what with only three of us out in Indian Country with our asses hanging out.

The best place to set up a hide was on terrain that afforded a three-sixty field of fire so you could get a shot off in any direction. I tried to choose a shallow rise with good cover in the middle of an open field. First of all, the gooks seldom expected a sniper to be hiding in grasslands. Secondly, tree lines spooked me because of the potential for booby traps.

We camouflaged ourselves with face paint and foliage before going out. I was always cautious about the enemy watching when I dropped out of a patrol. It was hard to overlook when a guy six feet five suddenly disappeared.

As soon as the patrol moved on, I radioed in map coordinates of our location so the mortar section knew exactly where we were in the event shit hit the proverbial fan and we required fire cover. I then checked out possible avenues of enemy approach, pinpointing ranges and angles where targets were most likely to show up. Lastly, I laid out an escape plan if things got too hot and we needed to bug out. I was methodical about

such things, careful about the details. After all, we were gambling our skins. I wanted all the trumps we could get.

Some days I killed someone, some days I didn't.

Captain Castagneti received intelligence about an enemy base camp deep in no-man's-land. I was ready. Sounded like another rare possible turkey shoot. Bravo Company saddled up at oh-dark-thirty -- the birds weren't even up -- and moved into position for an assault before the sun rose.

Seely and I along with a radioman selected a rise with a good field of fire into a thick forest of large trees with relatively little underbrush. The base camp supposedly lay just inside the woods. The company stripped itself of any gear that might rattle, bang, or catch on brush and cautiously moved out in the darkness of the predawn, leaving behind a depth of silence that made even loneliness seem cacophonous.

Daylight slowly seeped into the landscape, replacing darkness with the mist and soft shadows of morning. Gradually, I picked out well-camouflaged bunkers, tunnel openings, cooking fire rings, and a few low-to-the-ground hooches and shelters. Seeing them at all was like one of those novelty pictures where you had to stare deep into a maze of colors before you actually saw what was there.

It was a camp for the North Vietnamese Army, not a VC guerrilla hangout. My little sniper party lay silently waiting for the attack. It was like opening day of hunting season before any shots had been fired and you could still anticipate the coming action. We had the best stand location in the woods.

It was bright and clear with only a smear of haze through our optics, about a half hour after sunrise, when Bravo's Marines struck with such surprise that the NVA soldiers were literally caught with their pants down. Many fled in their skivvies as rifles banged in long, fierce fusillades and grenades popped. Through my scope I watched Marines blazing into the base camp, picking off any rabbits that jumped up, dumping grenades into the openings of bunkers and tunnels, and laying fire down on fleeing survivors. A fog of smoke eddied in and out among the trees.

My eyes scanned the outskirts of the action as I waited for bad guys to start coming out the back door. I didn't want to chance shooting among the Marines. Soon NVA were running out in numbers through an area about one hundred yards across. Ranges varied from about 600 yards to 800, depending upon where the targets emerged as they fled the chaos.

I started shooting, but I could only shoot so fast with a bolt-action rifle. A constant chatter of conversation passed between Jim and me as we spotted and selected targets.

"I'm going for this one...."

"One to the left, Greg...."

Seely watched the impact of rounds through his binoculars. Little explosions of foliage. Geysers erupting on the ground.

"Up and to the right, Greg...."

"Okay. This one's coming out...."

"You got him. He's down. He's not moving. Check the bunker, three bunkers up....He's sticking his head out. He's going to make a move...."

"Here he comes. I'm on him...."

"Good shot. There's another bunch. See 'em?"

It was a major adrenaline rush. Both of us vibrated from the excitement. I tapped off forty or fifty rounds in about thirty minutes, putting down at least four targets to stay. I might have nailed several more. Who was counting? Jim merely told me whenever I hit one, whereupon we skipped to the next target.

It was a huge day for Bravo Company. The body count was about 350. Dead gooks littered the base camp and out the back door. Blood was spilled everywhere, the smell of it so sickeningly fresh and strong mixed with gunpowder and exploding grenades that it carried to us on the rise above. I was exhausted when the killing ended -- mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Like I always said, some days I killed someone, some days I didn't.

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