

# Master Sniper

## The Story of White Feather



*Vietnam, the first war America lost. It split the country apart like nothing had in the 100 years since the Civil War. Students across the US protested soldiers' sacrifice in the jungles of a distant country that held no strategic significance for the United States. As the losses mounted with no end in sight and no plan for victory, war protests grew.*

*Nevertheless, amid all the blood and gore, certain people stood out for their bravery, loyalty and outstanding skill. Marine sniper Gunnery Sergeant Carlos Norman Hathcock II was one of them. His exploits became legendary within the Marine Corps. Although his records have since been beaten, he retains his iconic status as the understated country boy whose uncanny talent made him stand out.*



The young Marine sat perched in his sniper's nest on the southern finger of a lonely hill overlooking a wide valley in Vietnam. He stared through the scope on his modified M2 Browning machine gun, scanning the area for signs of the enemy. Crouched beside him was his spotter, gazing through his binoculars for signs of unfriendly forces.

In the distance the sniper could make out a speck wobbling its way up the road. He peered through his telescopic sight and as it grew closer, he could make out the form of a boy, perhaps 12 years old, peddling on his bicycle. A few moments passed and the sniper's face grew longer. Slung over each handlebar were two Soviet-made AK-47 rifles, with several more tied sideways beneath the seat. Hanging from the front

of the handlebars was a sack filled with hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

Obviously, this was not a transport meant to supply the local US Marine base. It was headed for the Viet Cong guerrillas who infested the surrounding woods. The weapons were to be distributed that night and turned against the US troops by the next day. From the boy's appearance and the way his sweaty khaki shirt clung to his back, he had probably been peddling for hours until he reached this neighborhood.

The American sniper did not like his job, but if he let this shipment pass, it would cost the lives of fellow servicemen. He tightened his grip on the machine gun's handles and waited. At 2,000 feet he finally squeezed the trigger.

Despite the extreme distance, the bullet hit its target—not the boy, but the bicycle frame, causing the rider to fly over the handlebars. The sniper hoped this would frighten the boy to run away. Then the Marines could intercept the shipment and the incident would be over.

However, the rider quickly jumped up and grabbed one of the assault rifles. With swift, precise motions that suggested plenty of experience with weapons, he jammed a loaded magazine into the weapon. He was no longer just aiding the enemy, but the enemy itself. The American sniper had no choice. He fired a second time. The boy-soldier was dead.

War forced people into terrible choices, but his job was to protect his fellow Marines. And his skill as a master marksman and stalker would save untold numbers of his fellow Americans from death at the hands of the Viet Cong.

## Born to Hunt

Carlos Norman Hathcock II was born on May 20, 1942, in North Little Rock, Arkansas, where his father was a railroad worker. He was an only child and his parents, Carlos and Agnes Hathcock, separated when he was young. Carlos was raised by his grandmother



Carlos Hathcock, far left, is presented the Wimbledon Cup in 1965.

in the backwoods of Geyer Springs, near Little Rock.

Hathcock was introduced to his first rifle at age three. His father returned from the European theater of World War II and presented him with a nonfunctioning World War I Mauser that he brought back as a trophy. Young Carlos would play in the woods, pretending he was tracking Japanese soldiers.

Later, Hathcock's father gave him a .22 caliber single-shot rifle. The boy soon learned to hunt small game to feed the family, which was destitute.

A writer once asked Hathcock who taught him to shoot. "I did," he replied. "There was nobody to teach me, so I had to learn myself."

By 10, Hathcock was hunting to feed his family. He later recalled, "As a young'n, I'd go sit in the woods and wait a spell. I'd just wait for the rabbits and squirrels 'cause sooner or later a squirrel would be in that very tree or a rabbit would be coming by that very log. I just knew it. Don't know why, just did."

At 15, Hathcock dropped out of high school and took a job with a concrete construction firm. But his childhood dream was something else entirely. One day, he hoped, he would become a Marine.

He spent two years in construction. On May 20, 1959, the day he turned 17 and became eligible to enlist in the Marine Corps, he signed up. He was sent to boot

camp at Camp Pendleton in San Diego and his instructors soon noticed that he excelled at marksmanship. Using the M1 Garand, a heavy semi-automatic rifle that became the standard-issue in the US Army before World War II, Hathcock would hit the 18-inch bull's-eye from 500 yards time and time again.

Next he was sent to Hawaii where he trained under Lieutenant Edward James Land, who headed the Hawaii Marines Rifle Team. While there Hathcock won the Pacific Division rifle championship and went on to win numerous awards for marksmanship. By 1965 he amassed enough points to be designated a Marine Corps Distinguished Sniper. His most prestigious accomplishment was the 1,000-yard national high-power rifle championship. He out-shot the other 3,000 contestants and was awarded the prized trophy, the Wimbledon Cup.



American soldiers man a machine gun from a concealed position during Operation Junction City in Vietnam, March 1967.



Small village bursting into flame under a spread of phosphorus explosives dropped during an American air strike against Viet Cong positions.



Captured Viet Cong guerrillas.



Viet Cong soldiers carry an injured American POW to a prisoner swap in 1972.