

L579 NCO HISTORY

GySgt CARLOS HATHCOCK II

United States Marine Corp Sniper

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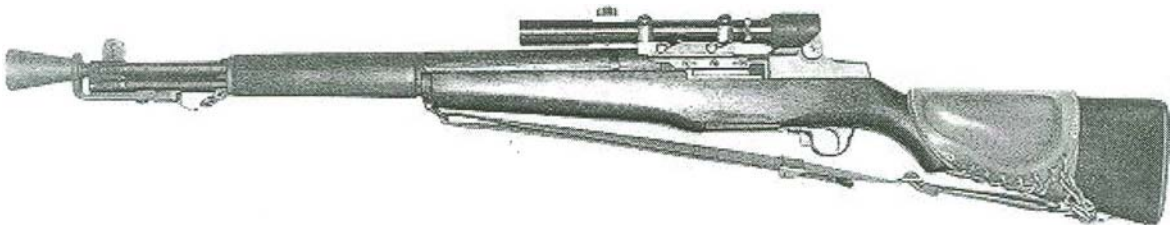
As soldiers, we look to other military members as models to emulate. These individuals are found throughout different times of our American history and scattered throughout our military services. The history of Gunnery Sergeant Carlos Hathcock of the United States Marine Corps is not a story of a simple, single act of heroism, but rather a career of continuing outstanding accomplishments. He served as one of the best Marine snipers during the Vietnam War. Working alone or as a sniping pair, he was always the consummate professional. He completed two tours of Vietnam with 93 confirmed enemy kills, the highest number for a Marine Corp sniper during that conflict. (Carlos Hathcock) In addition, he used innovative ways to advance the field craft of the sniper, through weapons and training. Ironically, the only decoration for valor that he won was for saving, not taking, lives. During an ambush, he risked his life to save others by evacuating Marines from a burning APC. GySgt Carlos Hathcock was a Non Commissioned Officer who provides an example of what a leader can be, could be and most importantly, should be.

**Background/ Dutiesffraining** - He was born on May 20, 1942, in a tiny farming community near Little Rock, Arkansas. 'Mostly from a common European background, there was a mix of Cherokee Indian in his blood. Even as a child, Carlos Hathcock was gifted with the abilities of a keen eye, quick reflexes and accurate aim. At age ten, he was already hunting the area around his grandmother's farm in Geyer Springs, AK with consistently successful results. Always drawn towards the military and specifically the Marine Corp, he signed up in the spring of 1959 at age 17 and was soon to become a "Hollywood" Marine. Bound for the San Diego Marine Corp Recruitment Depot for 13 weeks of boot camp, he completed it and afterwards finished an additional infantry school. His first assignment was as a machine gunner for a weapons platoon in Hawaii, which placed him near the thing that he loved the most, an arsenal.

While there, he attended and graduated from the USMC Scout/Sniper School. Quickly becoming recognized as an expert marksman, in 1962 he was reassigned to the Marine Corp Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina. At this base, he was given the opportunity to compete on the All Marine Champion Cherry Point Shooting team. Within three years he won Marine Corps, Interservice and National service championships. In fact, he set the record on the post "A" course by shooting 248 points of a possible 250-a record never matched again- and retired with the course. By August, 1965, he competed at the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio. It was here that he won the 1,000 yard National High-Powered Rifle Championship-the Wimbledon Cup, over 2,600 competitors. This was the beginning of his career as one of the most dangerous military man in the world: a Marine with patience, resolve, and a high-powered rifle. He would soon find that as a sniper, he needed all of these in the jungles of Vietnam. However, to understand the sniper in the modern conflict, we must first understand the tools of his trade.

Weapons- GySgt Hathcock was sent to Vietnam at a time that the American military was evaluating not only the weapons of the sniper, but even his role on the modern battlefield. Hathcock basically used four weapon models during his duty as a sniper and the following shows the rapid evolution of the tools used by the sniper.

The first was the M-IC.



Snipers achieved reasonably consistent results with the 30-06 caliber M1 C. This was a modification of the Garand M1 used during WWII. The range was between 400-600 yards, with 600 being the maximum effective range using the M82 Telescope.

The second rifle used was the Model 70, Winchester



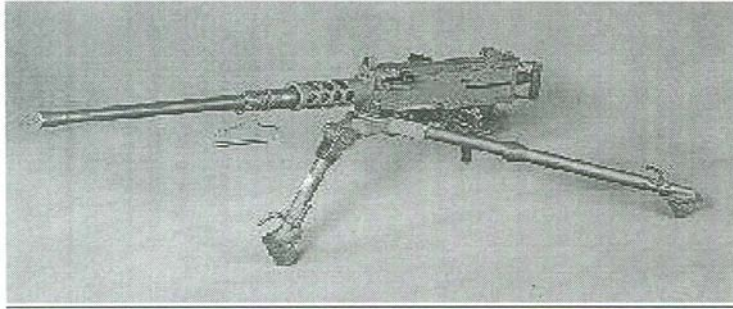
Snipers achieved increased distance with the .30-06 with the Unertl Ox scope. This was a civilian rifle being evaluated as a possible replacement to the MIC. The range was extended to 600-800 yards.

The third rifle used was the M40



Snipers achieved increased distance with the 7.62x51mm NATO (308 Win) caliber M40. The range was 600-800 yards, with 800 yards as the maximum effective range. Scopes included the Redfield 3-9X and the Unertl 10x.

The fourth weapon was the M2



The Browning M2 .50 caliber (12.7mm) Machine Gun has a maximum effective range of 3,000 meters. Sgt Hathcock modified the weapon by adding scope mounts that he had assisted in designing and had specially made in Vietnam. A Unertl or Lyman scope was attached and he would fire using the single round mode. In fact, until 2003, Hathcock held the world record for the longest documented sniping. He engaged an enemy soldier at 2,500 yards using the M2 and it was recorded as a confirmed kill. In fact, it was Hathcock that popularized the use of the M2 to such an extent, that superiors reconsidered the 50 cal in an expanded role. Currently the M82A1M (Barrett) is used as an anti-materiel weapon and EOD purposes, but has applications as an anti-sniper tool. This intent is a direct result of what GySgt Hathcock was trying to achieve. Using whatever tools were available to increase his abilities to accomplish the mission.

Deeds - Sgt Hathcock started his first tour in Southeast Asia in late 1965. Soon he was gaining a reputation for successful operations against the enemy. One notable case was when he tracked a Vietnamese sniper that was creating havoc within the American lines. This sniper had not only been killing U.S. servicemen, but was boldly establishing ambushes and capturing soldiers to gather intelligence. Brutal torture was then used to extract information from the captured Marines about troop strength and resources. Based on her vicious techniques as an interrogator, she gained the name "The Apache", and was one of the most successful Viet Cong snipers. The American troops were terrified to patrol the area because of her atrocities.

By careful planning, patience and skill, Sgt Hathcock was able to eliminate not only the sniper, but all of her team during a difficult, near-dusk encounter. He did this by concentrating in an area that he believed she would return. While establishing a sniping blind, he saw a single enemy scout move through a marked trail. However, in an "unprofessional and childish" act, he fought with his partner over who would shoot the soldier. This only alerted the scout and he was able to flee back to his boss "The Apache". She returned with her team to capture what she believed to be easy prey. As she was sneaking into the established kill zone, her movement was detected. Hathcock called in artillery and placed it behind her. This cut off an escape to the rear. In attempting to get away, she ran directly into Hathcock and his sniping partner. He killed her with two shots. His use of artillery and sniping skills eliminated a dangerous seven member team that late afternoon. His killing of the enemy sniper stabilized the area for months afterwards. However, things were about to change quickly for the American rifleman.

Convinced to do an interview for the U.S. military publication "Sea Tiger" in 1967, the journalist writing the expose assured Hathcock that the article distribution would remain within military channels. Carlos was taken by surprise when his wife wrote to him shortly thereafter that the article, almost word for word, was published in the local paper back in the states. This was disturbing because Hathcock had been telling his wife that he was working as a MP in a rear area. He had taken this approach because~ he wanted to isolate his wife from the brutal realism regarding the dangerous and brief life of a sniper. This was an alarming incident. But even more alarming was that within months, local flyers in Vietnam were offering a reward for the death of Long Tr'ang, the word that meant "white feather". Hathcock had taken to wearing a feather from a local bird in his boonie cap. This was his small way to defy the enemy and challenge them to match his skills in the field.

The Viet Cong had given him this name and placed a bounty worth three years wages (about \$10,000) for his capture-dead or alive. Military Intelligence even reported at one time that a platoon of NV A snipers had been trained to specifically eliminate Hathcock. In a later incident, one of the best Vietcong snipers tracked Carlos and his partner through thick jungle in a two day hunt. The final conclusion has become sniper legend and also Hollywood script. In a constantly enclosing kill zone, the snipers encircled one another, waiting for the other to make a fatal mistake. While concealed in a low gully, the NV A sniper saw a small white feather while peering through his scope. As he slightly moved his rifle to make the final adjustment before his killing shot, the sunlight reflected from his scope.

Seeing the flash from the reflection, Hathcock quickly raised his rifle, took rapid aim and sent a single round downrange. After scoping the area for other enemy movement, Hathcock and his partner moved to the site. His partner found that Hathcock had placed the round straight through the tube of the scope into the eye of the enemy sniper. Of course, the only way Hathcock could have accomplished this shot, was by firing at the same moment that the enemy was sighting his rifle on Hathcock. It was a battle of life and death based on seconds. This was another close brush with death, but this didn't deter him from going back into the jungle. He did not shrink from his duty and was more determined than ever to accomplish his mission.

Duty was his way of life. Once, while providing sniper support for Operation Rio Blanco, Hathcock worked tirelessly to provide a force multiplier to the troops by using his extraordinary ability to connect with the enemy. He remained with the troops after the original three day operation ended and continued to devastate the enemy over the next few weeks. In many of these operations, he would go into the jungle alone for long stretches at a time.

In fact, Sgt Hathcock was so focused on his task, that he would come in with one squad and catch another going out and fall right in with them. However, his self imposed high OPTEMPO put a burden on his physical well-being. He finally had to be placed under arrest and returned back to the company area for his own safety. When he arrived back to the sniper platoon base, his commander barely recognized the gaunt and hollow Marine. Carlos had lost so much weight that his uniform hung off of his shoulders and hips. With his eyes sunk deep into his sockets, he looked like an old man. He had started the operation with 32 kills and within a month finished with 63 confirmed. He was placed under house arrest until he physically recovered. He was 24 years old at the time.

The most significant event in his life happened in 1969, while into his second 13 month tour in Vietnam. He had returned to Vietnam after an absence of one year and was immediately assigned to the 7th Marine Sniper platoon. On arrival, he found a rag-tag group of Marines that had previously failed so badly at their sniping mission; they were now pulling daily details instead of engaging the enemy in the field. He immediately reorganized and retrained the snipers to such a high level that within months the sniper platoon set a Marine record of 72 confirmed kills for the month of July 1969. Things appeared to be back on track, but a major change was about to happen. On 16 September, Hathcock was waiting at his base camp preparing for a sniper mission, when an opportunity arose for him and his partner to accompany a Marine patrol. (Henderson) At first he declined, but then changed his mind thinking that he could help the patrol and still be back in time to complete the sniping operation. Climbing aboard the third APC, he was in the middle of six APC's that left that morning. A Marine Lieutenant in charge ordered the patrol to move out and they left the base camp. Hathcock choose to remain outside the APC and sat on top of the vehicle scanning the road ahead.

Further down the route, the L T decided to turn off the main road and follow a trail into the jungle. The path had been made by another patrol earlier that morning. One after another, the transports left the highway. As the third AMTRAC started its turn off the road, there was an earth shattering explosion. They had run over a 500 pound mine. Over 50 Marines scrambled for cover as they started taking fire from the nearby trees. Hathcock saw a forty foot high column of fire rise from the APC on which he and seven other Marines were riding. Even though his eyes were opened, he couldn't see anything because of the smoke and flames. He could feel the flames around him singeing his hair and skin. However, he couldn't escape the burning wreck because his legs were pinned down. He realized that it was the body of the Lieutenant trapping him in place.

Without thinking about his own safety, he grabbed the young officer by his flaming clothes and hurled him off the side. He then found his sniping partner and threw him clear of the fire. Remaining at the APC, he reached additional Marines and tossed four more out of the burning wreck. By now, Hathcock was on fire. His trousers were aflame and he could feel the flames at his chest, arms and neck. As another explosion occurred, he blindly jumped through a wall of flames into the gravel, landed hard and rolled. He knew that he had to get away from the burning vehicles. As he stood, he couldn't understand why he felt like he was weighted down and wet. It was because his skin now hung down from his arms. Looking, he realized the extent of his injuries. Other Marines responded and doused him with water that was nearby and quick action by a medic saved his life. Because of the isolated area, he walked assisted to a clearing where he was evacuated by helicopter to the hospital ship, the USS Repose. The difficult part was just beginning. After a series of hospital transfers, he found himself at the burn center at the Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas.

Arriving with a 102 degree fever and 43% of his body with "full thickness" burns he suffered through weeks of numerous skin grafts. He went through thirteen corrective operations and numerous bouts of infections.

He was the example of selfless service. After his recovery, he reported for duty at Quantico Virginia on January 1970 as a marksmanship instructor. Over the course of the next few years, he experienced dizziness, exhaustion and occasional loss of muscle control, but continued to serve for his "kids and the Corp". For years he was told that problems were due to the burns he had suffered. However, after additional testing, it was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. In 1979, while instructing at the Marine Scout Sniper School at Quantico, Virginia, which he had helped create, he collapsed while evaluating students in a field exercise.

The Marine Corp felt that they could no longer allow him to remain on active duty. He was released from duty at 19 years, 10 months of service. He was two months short of a full twenty year retirement.

Gunnery Sgt. (Ret.) Carlos N. Hathcock II, USMC, died on Feb 23, 1999 after a long decline in the grip of the only enemy he wasn't able to kill: multiple sclerosis.(Sniper Central) His name had been submitted for the Medal of Honor due to his actions in the 1969 ambush, but was downgraded to a Silver Star. But he is most recognized for the contributions that he made as a NCO. And this is shown in his legacy. The Marine Corp named the annual Carlos Hathcock Award after him for the Corp's best marksman. A Marine library as a center of learning in Washington carries his name. In 1990 a Marine unit raised \$5,000 in donations to fight multiple sclerosis. They brought it to his home the old-fashioned way, the Marine way: They ran 216 miles from Camp Lejeune, N.C., to Virginia Beach. They did this for an NCO who provided an example of what a leader can be, could be and most importantly, should be.

Carlos Hathcock, <http://www.seventh.com.au/flashpoint/sniperhistory.htm>

Henderson, Charles, *Marine Sniper, 93 Confirmed Kills*, Berkley Books, New York, NY: 1988

Sniper Central, Obituary of Carlos Hathcock, <http://www.snipercentral.com/wpost.htm>