

ARKANSAS BORN MARINE SNIPER CARLOS HATHCOCK TOOK OUT 'THE COBRA' IN EPIC FASHION

447

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MARINE SNIPER IN VIETNAM

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO GOT SCREWED OUT OF RECEIVING THE MEDAL OF HONOR



THE MOST DEADLY THING ON A BATTLEFIELD IS A WELL AIMED SHOT.

Sgt. Carlos Hathcock



NOV 9, 2021

Marine sniper Carlos Hathcock easily joins the ranks of history's greatest snipers, alongside figures such as Vasily Zaytsev, Lyudmila Pavlichenko, and Simo Hayha. He carried out his trade in Vietnam, racking up nearly 100 kills, and plenty more unconfirmed. He was so notorious during that war that the North Vietnamese dispatched a sniper known as 'The Cobra' to take him out. The Cobra failed this mission and ended up as another notch on Hathcock's tally.



Lieutenant General P. K. Van Riper, Commanding General Marine Corps Combat Development Command, congratulates Gunnery Sgt. Carlos Hathcock (Ret.) after presenting him the Silver Star during a ceremony at the Weapons Training Battalion. Standing next to Gunnery Sgt. Hathcock is his son, Staff Sgt. Carlos Hathcock, Jr

Hathcock was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1942 into a family that heavily relied on hunting to obtain food. He grew up in Wynne, Arkansas, living with his grandmother for the first 12 years of his life after his parents separated As a result, Hathcock became familiar with firearms at a young age. He had wanted to be in the US Marine Corps since childhood and joined the service at 17. He was sent over to Vietnam in 1966 as a military policeman but was quickly noted for his impressive natural talent with a rifle.

His skills were useful elsewhere, so he was transferred to Captain Edward James Land's sniper platoon, a role that he embraced with great enthusiasm.

Before long Hathcock had dispatched a huge amount of targets and earned himself a fearsome reputation. He was known to wear a white feather while on missions as a way of taunting the enemy. This motif became famous among the North Vietnamese, who called him 'White Feather.'



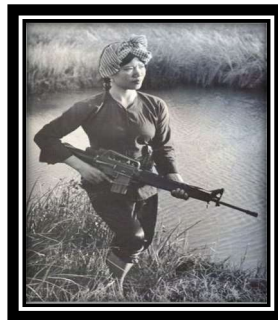
Hathcock was dropping enemy Vietnamese troops left, right and center, so they placed the highest bounty of the war on his head; a sum of \$30,000.

Plenty of Vietnamese snipers came to collect the bounty, but as Marty Robbins' Big Iron goes; "Many men had tried to take him and that many men were dead."

THE WHITE FEATHER

Part of Hathcock's popularity stems from the great detail he went into when recounting his eventful "hunts."

One particularly troubling story for him was about "Apache," a female sniper who was extremely sadistic in their work. She had been operating in the jungles of Vietnam long before Hathcock arrived, torturing captured Marines within earshot of their base.



APACHE

When recalling the experience, he said "She skinned one kid that she'd captured all night and half the next day. When she turned him loose, he died right in the wire." As a result, his mission to eliminate this sniper was "very, very personal."



One day out on patrol Hathcock came across a group of Viet Cong (VC). He didn't notice anything out of the ordinary until one of the troops squatted down to urinate. He knew he'd found Apache.

"I saw her squat down to tinkle," Hathcock says. "The guys with her tried to get her to stop but I stopped her. I put one extra in her for good measure." However scholars have cast doubt on Hathcock's account and questioned the existence of "Apache".

THE COBRA

Hathcock's most famous story details his showdown with the "Cobra," a North Vietnamese Army sniper who was sent in with the sole task of killing Hathcock. The sniper made a point to Hathcock by killing a man right outside his living quarters.

"I took a vow, right there and then. I was going to get him some way or another." Hathcock said. Hathcock admitted that the Cobra was skilled, so the game was on for who could get who first. "He was close to being as good as I was but ain't no way," he said. "Ain't nobody that good." While he was making his way through the jungle, he tripped over a fallen tree.

At this exact moment, the Cobra fired at him, which forced the shot to miss. It hit his spotter's canteen instead.



After failing this shot the Cobra left his position, as any good sniper would, and the two opposing marksmen ended up on the opposite sides to where they had started.

But the Cobra had just put himself into a compromised position; facing into the sun.

Hathcock immediately took the opportunity and fired. "The sun glinted off the lens of his scope, I guess," he said. "I saw the glint and I shot where the glint was... By the looks of things, I was just the quickest on the trigger, otherwise, he'd have killed me."

THE MISSION WHERE MANY THOUGHT HE'D NOT RETURN FROM

In one of his last missions on a tour in Vietnam, he crawled nearly two miles to kill a Vietnamese general and escaped.

When the mission came down, he didn't have all the details but he knew tough missions at the end of a tour were a recipe for disaster. Rather than send one of his men, he volunteered for the mission himself.

"Normally, when you take on a mission like that, when you're that short, you forget everything," Hathcock said in an interview. "Ya know, tactics, the whole ball of wax, and you end up dead. And, I did not want none of my people dead, and so I took the mission on myself."

Hathcock was flown towards the objective, but was dropped well short of the target so he wouldn't be given away. He made his way to a tree line, but still had 1,500 yards to move from the tree line to his final firing position. So, he started crawling.

"I went to my side. I didn't go flat on my belly, because I made a bigger slug trail when I was on my belly. I moved on my side, pretty minutely, very minutely. I knew I had a long ways to go, didn't want to tire myself out too much."

As he crawled, he was nearly discovered multiple times by enemy soldiers.

"Patrols were within arm's reach of me. I could've tripped the majority, some of them. They didn't even know I was there."

The complacency of the patrol allowed Hathcock to get 700 yards from his target.

"They didn't expect a one-man attack. They didn't expect that. And I knew, from the first time when they came lolly-gagging past me, that I had it made."

The talented sniper made his way up to his firing position, avoiding patrols the whole way and slipping between machine gun nests without being detected.

He arrived at his firing position and set up for his shot.

"Seen all the guys running around that morning, and I dumped the bad guy."

Hathcock took his shot and punched right through the chest of the general he was targeting. At that moment, he proved the brilliance of firing from grass instead of from the trees.

"When I made the shot, everybody ran the opposite direction because that's where the trees were," he said. "That's where the trees were. It flashed in my mind, 'Hey, you might have something here.'"

Per his escape plan, Hathcock crawled to a nearby ditch and crawled his way back out of the field.

For the first time in four days, he was able to walk.

"So, I went to that ditch, little gully, and made it to the tree line, and about passed out when I stood up to get a little bit better speed."

On September 16, 1969, Hathcock's career as a sniper came to a sudden end along Highway 1, north of LZ Baldy, when the LVT-5 he was riding on struck an anti-tank mine. Hathcock pulled seven Marines from the flame-engulfed vehicle, suffering severe burns (some third-degree) to his face, arms, and legs, before someone pulled him away and placed him in water because he was unaware of how badly he had been burnt.

While recovering, Hathcock received the Purple Heart. In 1996, 27 years after this happened, he was awarded a Silver Star for this. See the Citation on the following page.

Hathcock and the seven marines he pulled from the vehicle were evacuated by helicopter to hospital ship USS *Repose*, then to a naval hospital in Tokyo, and ultimately to the burn center at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas.

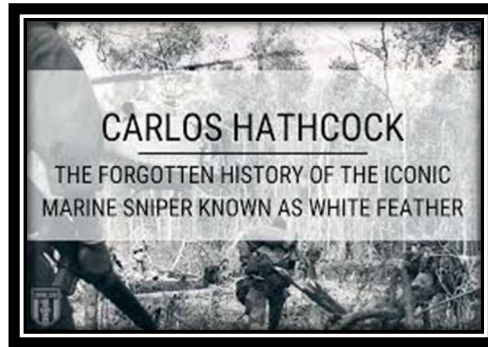
After returning to active duty, Hathcock helped establish the Marine Corps Scout Sniper School at the Marine base in Quantico, Virginia. Due to the extreme injuries he suffered in Vietnam, he was in nearly constant pain, but continued to dedicate himself to teaching snipers.

In 1975, Hathcock's health began to deteriorate, and he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He stayed in the Marine Corps, but his health continued to decline. Just 55 days short of the 20 years that would have made him eligible for regular retirement pay, he received a permanent disability separation. Being medically discharged, he received 100 percent disability pay. He would have received only 50 percent of his final pay grade had he retired after 20 years.

He fell into a state of depression when he was forced out of the Marines because he felt as if the service had kicked him out. During this depression, his wife Jo nearly left him but decided to stay. Hathcock eventually picked up the hobby of shark fishing, which helped him to overcome his depression.

He ended the war with 93 confirmed kills and a world record for the longest sniper shot which remained unbroken for 35 years. Due to the way kills were confirmed during the Vietnam War, Hathcock's kill tally is likely to be much, much higher. He himself estimates this to be 300 to 400 kills.

The heroic Marine Corps sniper passed away on February 22, 1999, at the age of 56. He is buried at Woodlawn Memorial Gardens in Norfolk, Virginia.



THE SILVER STAR



AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING [Vietnam War](#)

SERVICE : [Marine Corps](#)

RANK: [Staff Sergeant](#)

[CITATION](#)

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Carlos N. Hathcock, II (MCSN: 1873109), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Sniper, Seventh Marines, FIRST Marine Division, in connection with military operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 16 September 1969. Staff Sergeant Hathcock was riding on an Assault Amphibious Vehicle which ran over and detonated an enemy anti-tank mine, disabling the vehicle which was immediately engulfed in flames. He and other Marines who were riding on top of the vehicle were sprayed with flaming gasoline caused by the explosion. Although suffering from severe burns to his face, trunk, and arms and legs, Staff Sergeant Hathcock assisted the injured Marines in exiting the burning vehicle and moving to a place of relative safety. With complete disregard for his own safety and while suffering excruciating pain from his burns, he bravely ran back through the flames and exploding ammunition to ensure that no Marines had been left behind in the burning vehicle. His heroic actions were instrumental in saving the lives of several Marines. By his courage, aggressive leadership, and total devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Staff Sergeant Hathcock reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. (end of citation)

After the War there were a lot of individuals who felt that Carlos should have been awarded the Medal Of Honor for the things he did. Below is an article from the Virginia Pilot dated July 10, 1996, 21 years after the war ended, which pretty well shows the feelings and opinions of many people and the facts about the entire issue.

DATE: Wednesday, July 10, 1996
SECTION: MILITARY NEWS
SOURCE: ALVA CHOPP, CORRESPONDENT

PAGE: A6
EDITION: FINAL

TAG: 9607090270
LENGTH: 109 lines

THE ARTICLE:

HONEST-TO-GOD HERO" GETS CREDIT AT LAST HIS ACT OF HONOR ISN'T TAKEN LIGHTLY

He became a Marine Corps legend in Vietnam by delivering 93 confirmed sniper kills on the North Vietnamese, along with countless unconfirmed others.

Today, friends of Staff Sgt. Carlos Hathcock II believe he might be better remembered for saving lives during the war in Southeast Asia.

They have launched a letter-writing campaign to nominate the Virginia Beach gunnery sergeant for the Medal of Honor for his rescue of seven wounded Marines from a burning armored personnel carrier in September 1969.

Whether they succeed hangs in the balance this month: Hathcock is expected to be the subject of a review that could see him recommended for the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross or other decorations.

Hathcock, now 54, (he died at 56) was riding in a convoy with counterintelligence officers and other Marines when their vehicle rolled over a 500-pound mine and exploded in a fireball at a landing zone near the South Vietnamese town of Que-son.

Severely burned, his clothes in flames, Hathcock managed to pull seven fellow Marines from the wreckage before another survivor doused him.

He received the Purple Heart, but stories vary among his supporters about why he was not nominated for other decorations.

Edward Hyland, a Marine first lieutenant and senior officer on the personnel carrier that day, feels a personal responsibility for the oversight. When asked about a medal, Hathcock insisted he didn't want any award," Hyland remembers, that he was just doing his job. So I respected his wishes and did not write it up at that time."

Over the years Hyland, now living in Arizona, would remember the explosion, Hathcock's burning uniform, Hathcock's face as the sergeant pulled him to safety. Hyland suffered burns over 40 percent of his body and had his left arm amputated at the shoulder as a result of his injuries, but he credits Hathcock with saving his life.

Uncomfortable with not having nominated Hathcock for a medal, Hyland eventually asked congressmen and senators to intervene on the Marine's behalf.

But too much time had passed: Applications for medals close three years after the incidents for which they were requested. All attempts to reopen the investigation were turned away by the Marine Corps.

Then came the National Defense Authorization Act of 1996.

The bill opened a one-year window in which veterans could resubmit applications for various decorations they might deserve, but did not receive during their service in the war.

And for Vietnam veterans, it included the Medal of Honor.

Since the bill's February passage into law, the Marine Corps' Washington-based Military Awards Branch has received 56 requests from senators and congressmen that Hathcock's deeds be investigated, along with countless letters supporting his nomination.

Hathcock's nomination is expected to go before a Board of Officers for review this month. If approved, it will proceed to the Secretary of the Navy, who can approve the action for the Navy's highest award, the Navy Cross, or a lesser medal or recommend that it be submitted to President Bill Clinton for the Medal of Honor.

Approval for the Medal of Honor is not taken lightly," said Fred Anthony, the Awards Branch's head.

We conduct extensive research to ensure that the recipient is eligible."

Only 180 Medals of Honor have been awarded to Marines during the period from World War II to the Vietnam war, Anthony said. Of those, 120 were awarded posthumously.

Hathcock's legendary exploits as a combat sniper have spawned countless magazine and newspaper articles, a book - "Marine Sniper: 93 Confirmed Kills" - and, loosely, the movie "Sniper."

Besides his typical grunt-style crewcut, there's little about Hathcock to betray his past today: Slightly built, battling multiple sclerosis, he is unable to hold a rifle, and spends most of his days watching television in his room.

The walls around him are covered with accolades won in nearly 20 years in the Corps, however, and a good many others can be found elsewhere: the Carlos Hathcock Award is presented annually to the best marksman in the Marine Corps, a Corps library in Washington bears his name, and competitive shooters often bandy his name about as the world's once-best.

Still, if not for his Purple Heart and his Silver Star which he received 27 years after the event, his role in the Que-son rescue would be officially unrecognized.

Since word got out about the medal nomination, friends and fans from across the country have called his home to offer encouragement to Hathcock and his wife, Jo.

They've received thousands of calls and letters over the past few months and their home is filled with stacks of papers and files they've accumulated.

I would see people being rewarded for acts that to me are nothing like what Carlos did," said Hyland. "If Carlos is awarded the medal, I'll feel an enormous amount of pride that another Marine was recognized and personal satisfaction knowing I had something to do with it."

Ernie Padgett, president of the Virginia Shooting Sports Association, met Hathcock only three years ago, but six months later began supporting the medal campaign.

It just seemed obvious to a lot of people that Carlos deserved the Medal of Honor," he said. I contacted two of the men on the amtrac that day and their accounts were very clear. All he had to do was turn and jump to safety and he would've been OK.

But once safely away from the explosion, Carlos went back in to search for more victims. One reason I'm supporting this cause is that I want young kids today to know about an honest-to-God hero."

Hathcock doesn't see himself that way. His response to all the attempts on his behalf is simple: If it happens, it happens," he says. "It can't change things, and I'll go on living the same way I am.

I must admit, though, that I'm in awe at all the people who are supporting me," he said. "And I would be really happy if it happens."

D. KEVIN ELLIOTT/The Virginian-Pilot

Carlos Hathcock II, now 54, pulled seven colleagues from a burning vehicle in Vietnam in 1969. At the time, the Marine didn't want any medals, and his senior officer took him at his word. But that could change this month.

Sadly, Carlos Hathcock never got his "Medal Of Honor". Too much time had passed. Applications for medals close three years after the incidents for which they were requested

