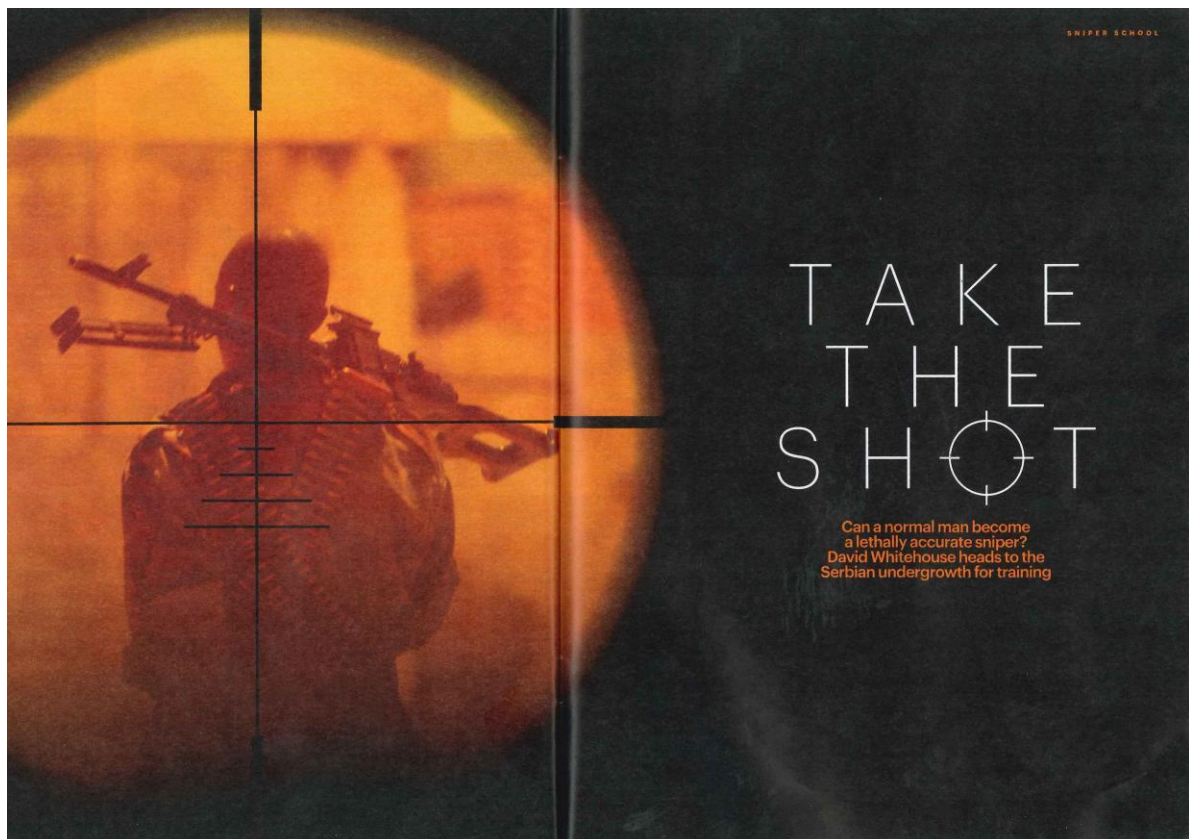


ShortList

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ShortList



SNIPER SCHOOL

In 2004, my colleagues gave me a nickname. My head is a little too large for my body. They called me 'Sniper's Dream'. Eight years later, one of the world's best snipers is trying to look around my massive head and out of the rear windscreen of his car as he reverses at great speed down the hard shoulder of a Serbian motorway, at

midnight, towards the pub where he has just accidentally left his bag.

Kylie Minogue's *Step Back In Time* blares from the radio. I'm scared. He's 6ft 4in, his DNA spliced with grizzly bear. I try to remember what he told me: "If you are not scared, you are crazy. But a sniper can control their fear." I'm not quite a sniper yet.

We are in the forest near Vrnjacka Banja, a couple of hours from Belgrade, to learn how to shoot very small targets from very far away. The sharpshooter has long been combat's most feared soldier. During the First World War, captured snipers weren't even afforded the same liberties as the infantry. Rather than being taken hostage, they were summarily killed. Their modus operandi was considered too cold a method of visiting death upon another. They are the deadly enemy you cannot see. They are the very embodiment of terror. They're the devil.

"Something in the brain of a sniper is special," says Dusan (name changed to protect his identity). "A sniper chooses everything. Who. Where. When. An execution in the pull of a trigger. They are the master of a life. The good sniper is not the best shot, but the one who can live with it afterwards."

He'd know. In a modern context, sniping as an art form is synonymous with the war that raged in this region during the Nineties, a time when his tutors and their peers were first joining the Serbian army. I am keen to know how a man prepares himself to send a bullet in the direction of someone else. Dusan tells me a story. He and his squadron would split into pairs, both don bulletproof vests and take it in turns to fire a pistol into each other from a few feet away. "What's scarier?" he asks. "To shoot your friend or to look at them pointing a gun at you? They are both f*cking scary. But how else are you going to get used to that feeling?"

That 'feeling' is looking through your scope at a target, knowing that

with the slightest movement of your finger, you and the target will forever be inextricably linked. Only one of you will still be in working order.

I am handed a gun for the first time in my life and after some training in how to use it, given a bullet in a golden casing. It is 7.9mm calibre, and apparently, "there is not a single bulletproof vest in the whole world that can stop it". This would suggest there is no such thing as a bulletproof vest.

BULLET TIME

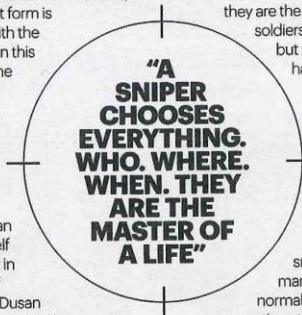
When you look through a rifle's scope, the gun becomes an organ. The crosshair quivers with the nervous staccato of your breath. The barrel mimics the drumbeat of your heart. Stillness is an impossibility. Your job is to find peace in the opposite of peace. The fight is as mental as it is physical. I learn of one Serbian soldier who, fearing that he'd been spotted, had no choice but to lay silently awake in the rain, mud and burning sunshine for eight days straight before making his escape. He can no longer urinate and is regularly hooked up to a kidney dialysis machine.

A sniper represents both destruction and isolation, an idiosyncrasy that has fuelled a romantic image of them. Films are based on their lives, games (such as the inspiration for this trip, upcoming release *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2*) are based on their skill and myths are borne of what they did or didn't do. Nine seconds of Lee Harvey Oswald's life are among the most discussed in history.

"It's a sh*tty job," says Dusan. "There is no glory. You can't clean your teeth. You can't eat. You are a hunter, they are the animal. Most

soldiers have each other, but not snipers - they have to go looking for trouble on their own. In 10 years of war here, everyone had a chance to kill. Most people can't, or can't do it again. Some can. They are not maniacs. They are normal people. But at the same time, they are different."

I fire and the barrel burns the air around it. The sulphur stinks of all the world's bad eggs. I've no idea whether I hit the target some 100 metres away. The kick of the shot threatened to smash my eye socket to a paste, so I tried to get out of the way. It's pointless to say there is no feeling like firing a gun. There is no feeling like doing the Hoovering. There is no feeling like cutting your toenails. But nothing



SHORTLIST'S DAVID COMPLETES HIS FIRST TARGET PRACTICE



THE SNIPER'S SCOPE BRINGS A DISTANT TARGET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



THE SERBIAN TUTORS HONED THEIR CRAFT IN THE REGIONAL CONFLICTS OF THE NINETIES

IMPOSSIBLE SNIPER SHOTS
SHARPSHOOTERS WHO PUT WILLIAM TELL TO SHAME

- Corporal Craig Harrison, Central Helmand, Afghanistan, 2009**
Zeroing in on two Taliban machine gunners 1.54 miles away, Corporal Harrison, of the Blues and Royals, pulled off the longest sniper shot on record by taking out both insurgents. He had to fire 6ft up and 20in to the left to allow for the bullets' spin and drift over distance.
- Carlos Hathcock, Vietnam, 1967**
The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) had a \$30,000 bounty on US sniper Hathcock. One rival NVA sniper, named 'Cobra', sought to claim the money when he had Hathcock in his crosshairs, but the American had seen Cobra's weapon glinting and put a bullet down the enemy's scope.
- Six-man US Navy Seal team, Somali Coast, 2009**
The team lay on a Destroyer

waiting for the perfect shot. They fired at the same time from 800 yards, dropping three pirates and leaving the captain unscathed.

- Corporal Matt Hughes, Al Faw, Iraq, 2007**
The Royal Marine corporal hit an Iraqi shooter in the chest from 900 yards, killing him instantly. Fierce winds meant he had to aim 56ft to the left and 35ft above his target. "It was a bit like David Beckham taking a free-kick," Hughes said of his shot.
- Steve Reichert, Lutafiyah Iraq, 2004**
Marine Corps sniper Reichert saw three enemy soldiers duck behind a brick wall. He approximated where the targets would be and fired a round from a mile away. It penetrated the wall and killed one man, disabling the other two with shrapnel and brick fragments.



SNIPERS ALLOWED NAVY SEALS TO FOIL PIRATES OFF THE SOMALI COAST

SNIPER SCHOOL

"I FIRED SEVEN ROUNDS - THEY ALL FOUND THEIR MARK"

A FORMER SNIPER TALKS BREATHING TECHNIQUES, BULLET TRAJECTORY AND THE PSYCHE OF THE EXPERT MARKSMAN

Scott Street is an ex Gunnery Sergeant, Naval Special Warfare Development Group/Seal Team Six sniper.

"Once you're deployed, you don't think about anything else but the shot you're about to make. Wife, family, financial trouble - none of it matters. It's all about minimising your wobble area to make that impossible shot possible.

"It's a real skill to stay focused on a fixed point for an indefinite amount of time - that ability is what

the first thing I had to do was normalise my body after the exertion. A heavy pulse and breathing can throw out a shot, which is why we always try to pull the trigger between heartbeats.

"My spotter and I lay down for four hours in desert ghillie suits, prone with minimal movement. We 'glasses' the whole place with laser rangefinders so that wherever the enemy was we knew the range needed to take them out. I was in



SNIPERS ALWAYS TRY TO PULL THE TRIGGER BETWEEN HEARTBEATS

turns the guy who is merely a good shot into a sniper. My trick was to continually run down formulas in my head for different shots to target and think about my kill history to see if there was anything I could use to replicate a kill.

"One of my last outs involved a six-mile walk through the Afghan desert to a derelict house that we had intelligence was going to be used for a high-level meet. When we were in range of the target location,

"A HEAVY PULSE AND BREATHING CAN THROW OUT A SHOT"

position, 800 metres away, to keep the enemy off an extraction team that had followed us in.

"Before the first shot I took a breath and let half out. This gives your body an oxygen boost that improves your eyesight. You then have eight seconds to take the shot before the body starts to react to the lack of oxygen. I fired seven rounds, all of which found their mark. The target was secured and an air strike did the rest."

else puts you so close to the thin line that separates light and dark, life and death. So close that through the scope you can see the target's eyes twinkling, ignorant in that last second of bliss. Dusan cites a recent report he read: only 10 per cent of US soldiers in Iraq get to fight. Only two per cent of those hit an enemy. Only two per cent of those are good at it. The ones that can do it again. "Those are the people," he says, "that they should pay in gold."



A SNIPER CAN EXPECT TO WAIT FOR HOURS FOR THE RIGHT SHOT

IN MY SIGHTS

By 6am the next morning I'm face-down in a puddle. I'm as familiar with it as you can be with a puddle because I've been lying in it for almost an hour. It's as cold, wet and awful as when we first met. It's what I imagine it's like in the belly of a whale. My mission, to sneak unseen through the forest to the open ground surrounding a hunting lodge that looks more like a gulag camp, is almost complete. I am wearing a

camouflaging ghillie suit. When I lay still in the undergrowth, sniper rifle and all, I am almost imperceptible. Yesterday a fellow trainee couldn't spot me from 10ft away. I am sweaty and

"WOMEN ARE THE BEST KILLERS BECAUSE THEY ARE MOTHERS. THEY GET IN, DO THE JOB, AND COME OUT"

uncomfortable, a mosquito is sucking on my leg like a hungry calf at a juicy teat, but I am silent and unseen. That is the job. I've been watching Dusan and his friends drinking coffee on the balcony. He is so close in my sights that I can read the time on his watch. My rifle is loaded with



FOR HIS FINAL TEST, DAVID HAD TO BLEND IN TO THE SERBIAN WOODLAND



SNIPER SCHOOL

blanks, but seeing a human move in its sight is itself a bullet in the gut. It's ghoulish, powerful. The silence in that second is as silent as silent gets. I have my finger on the trigger. No one knows I'm here.

"Know who the best snipers are?" Dusan had asked me the day before.

"Women. Women are always the best killers because women are mothers. Men want to fight, so they go for glory and that's when you make a mistake and get killed. But women want to go home. Everything they do is for their family, and they want to see them again. So they get in, do the job, and come out. They are killers. I would say never look in the target's eyes. They are the windows to the soul, you will never forget them. But I met a woman in the Russian army, 50-plus kills, whose trademark is to shoot through the eyes. Like I say, you can either live with it or you can't."

Back in my puddle I can see Dusan's eyelashes, but, no, I decide, I'm still not close enough. I shimmy on my sodden

belly through the undergrowth, dragging my carpet of thorns and mud. Then I spot them through a gap in the thicket. I am 20 metres away. I try to remember what I've learned. Slow, shallow breath. Steady arm. Check my escape route. Take aim. I can almost smell that coffee.

The dog is a metre away when it starts barking. I leap from the bush like there is a lobster where my pants once were. The mission is over.

"Why are you 20 metres away?" asks Dusan. "You have a high-calibre sniper rifle in your hands. You can spot me easily from 300 metres with that. Don't you remember anything I taught you?" I'd tried to get as close as I could. I'm not out out to be a sniper. "Typical man," he says, "always going for glory." The barking dog follows the undignified soldier to the showers.

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 is released on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC in early 2013; sniperghostwarrior.com

"I WOULD SAY NEVER LOOK IN THE TARGET'S EYES. YOU WILL NEVER FORGET THEM"

ON-SCREEN SNIPERS

CINEMA'S MOST CAPTIVATING AND CLINICAL MARKSMEN

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

He may have been cold and calculating with a nice line in cravats, but Edward Fox's 'The Jackal' wasn't a particularly good shot. He gets into a classic sniper's position to take out the French president, before missing by a mile.



THE JACKAL DID EVERYTHING RIGHT - UNTIL IT CAME TO PULLING THE TRIGGER

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

Private Daniel Jackson (Barry Pepper) quotes the Bible as he shoots his way off the beach. And Steven Spielberg's camera peers down the scope of a German sniper, just before he gets an eyeful of one of Jackson's rounds.

home picking off bad guys, it's because at the time of filming (like 80 per cent of the cast) he was an active Navy Seal.

ENEMY AT THE GATES

Amid the rubble of Stalingrad and dodgy accents, this film plays out the real-life game of cat and mouse that occurred between Vasily Zaytsev (Jude Law) and a German marksman sent to kill him. The true identity of the German has never been revealed.

THE HURT LOCKER

Kathryn Bigelow's hit wasn't all about bombs. We tag along with a sniper and spotter while they take down three Iraqi insurgents over a number of hours. They hit their targets from more than nine football fields away.

ACT OF VALOR

If you wondered why 'Weimay' looks so at



BEFORE FIRING, IT'S GOOD TO HAVE AN ESCAPE ROUTE

PHOTOGRAPHS: CORBIS, REX FEATURES, © TIM ANDERSON