

## How to Catch a Sniper

by PF Mosquito

It all happened in the ruined shell of some forgotten town in the hinterlands of France, smashed up like it was an egg placed in between two thick books which were then slammed together. Such towns were ubiquitous at this stage of the war, so trying to remember where this all happened is nigh impossible.

That said, it is one of those places which, if I saw it again, I'd instantly recognize. As it happens, I knew the layout of the ruins like the back of my hand... which I had several opportunities to study intently as I lie in the alleyway, bleeding out. My hands were the last thing I could see as the curtain of death slowly enveloped me.

The two armies had cleared out. It was no longer an object of contention for them. But I was a member of the Pathfinder squad, which took to heart the maxim, "first in, last out." There was still the hint of an enemy presence, so it didn't feel right to leave the town without first taking a final patrol through the town's vital parts. Emerging from one, a shot rang out. Down I went.

Piercer.

It was *Piercer*.

I was laid out like a mangy cur by that renowned Axis sniper, Piercer.

And this I could not abide.

Unfortunately, there was only one way for me to re-enter the town. It was down south, about two sprints away from the rest of the town. Once you reached the outskirts, the cover wasn't much better. A row of buildings ran parallel with the road, which funneled into a larger complex of ruins. If someone knew that the enemy was coming from the south, he'd have a clear shot from any angle he desired. The row of buildings might shield me from sniper fire, but there was still a large open space between them and the city outskirts that would have to be traversed. The patient sniper, knowing all this, would never have anything to fear.

Piercer was such a sniper.

Having been cut down in one direction, I took a different tact, crawling to the gutted remains of some poor peasant's house that allowed me a better view of the town. I fumbled with my binoculars, knowing that if I wasn't careful, the motion would catch his attention, and death would follow an instant later. I scanned the complex. Nothing. Still keeping to my belly, I aimed for a bush as my next destination. It wasn't much, but if I hadn't been spotted, it would perhaps be the concealment I needed before moving ahead.

He let me get a few meters towards my goal and put a round through my head.

I clenched my teeth.

I had expected to get popped, but in exchange I had hoped to learn his location. I had zilch for my efforts.

There was nothing for it but to give it another go.

I know what you're thinking. If I'm dead--now thrice--how is it that I keep getting new opportunities to die yet again? This is one of those magical realms where the keepers of life and death are a tad on the capricious side. After you die... or even if you just want to move along to a different place... you just 'despawn' and then 'spawn' back in somewhere else.

As I spawn in again, I think about this whole idea of 'spawning.' There is something about the word I don't like. The image of thousands of frog eggs comes unbidden into my mind. That is not how I like to picture myself. If 'spawning' isn't the best description, neither is reincarnation: upon death, regardless of what my French uniform would suggest, I do not come back as the frog before working my way up to cow. I do not even come back as some other person; for example, if I was some other soldier right now, say, one named Agave, I might stand a better chance of getting out of my current predicament. No, I come back as *me*.

As I toss smoke and run like a lunatic for cover, bullets zipping by my ears, I think to myself that it's more like a resurrection. A few moments later, I lather myself up in resurrection-cream again, because I'm dead, Jim. He got me again.

This time, though, I got something from him out of the deal. I now know approximately where he is. Clearly, though, it's time for a new strategy.

Before I leave the safety of the my resurrection-building, I dig through the remains of the armory. It's been picked through pretty good, and the Allied cause has already made off with the good stuff, but I know that what I'm looking for is not used nearly as much as it ought to be. The odds are good I'll find one. Tossing aside a few dusty satchel bags with the name 'Cabby' scrawled on them, sure enough, there lies a mortar tube with a case of smoke rounds next to it. I gather it all up as quickly as I can and head to the roof.

Using the pitch of the roof to shield me, I first fire off a round of high explosive to make sure my range is right. It is. I switch to the smoke canisters. I put a thick wall of smoke between my location and the row of buildings that provides my best cover into the town, and then a few more in the killing field between the row of buildings and the town, proper.

I move fast. That smoke doesn't last forever. I don't even have time to grab a different weapon. I'm stuck with the rifle. Since Piercer 'only' has a rifle, it is a fair fight. However, I'm feeling vengeful at this point, and what I really want is Bar's submachine gun so I can drain a full magazine into Piercer's chest. Settling for the rifle, I run like the wind.

Fortunately, I had planned ahead. The smoke I dropped in the killing field was dropped last, so there was still some to work with when I got to it. For the first time in an hour, I stepped inside city limits. I hastily made for a ruin that still had four walls, so I could lie down and catch my breath without getting capped as I thought through my next move.

I noted to myself that throughout my smoke-guantlet, I hadn't heard a single shot.

It could be because Piercer hadn't *had* a shot. Perhaps my curtain of smoke had so concealed my movements that he never caught a glimpse of my body streaking through it. This seemed unlikely. Given his last known location, he could have had me, literally, dead to rights several times.

The town was eerily silent. I belly-crawled out of the building so that my own footsteps wouldn't give me away. I was pleased that I was able to get to the next building without being 'dead-ed', since the last time I thought I was invisible, I discovered that Piercer had been playing with me, taking me out just at the moment that I thought I was safest.

I moved craftily and as silently as possible towards the sniper-hide he had been using, being sure that my angle of approach would be from behind his line of sight.

I didn't really believe that Piercer hadn't shot at me because he didn't have a visual on me. He's not that kind of soldier. Some perspective is in order.

When the Axis army prepares to roll up on a town, they like to 'prep' it first. They set up artillery and hammer it awhile. Bombers come in to cut morale down a notch. But they are not above propaganda when it is available, and it was available in this attack, too. Just hours earlier, a JU52 had come flying over. Perched, as I was, on the roof of the church, watching the attack unfold, I had a perfect view of the thousands of fluttering leaflets the plane dropped onto the town. I scooped up one from the several that landed on the church, I saw beaming up at me, the gritty, determined, and slightly smug face of the master assassin, Piercer. In blurred typeface below was the caption, "He's coming for you."

The threat was not idle. Having been party to such battles in the past, I knew that they only dropped this leaflet when Piercer was actually available to make an appearance. The leaflet often had its desired effect: stifling our movements, making us over-cautious, and so on. It worked because Piercer had a reputation. A well-earned reputation. Give Piercer a rifle and set him loose in a town, and havoc would follow as he moved from one hiding place to another, plinking one of my fellow soldiers before moving off to another.

That's why I knew he did not shoot me because he hadn't seen me through the smoke. He hadn't seen me at all, because *he was no longer in the same location*. Perhaps he had re-located because he guessed that my smoke trick would do the job, but at any rate, he had almost certainly displaced.

Displacing is the technique whereby one engages the enemy from one location and then moves to engage the enemy from yet another location.

It was a technique that had led to innumerable complaints from soldiers on both sides of the war. It wouldn't be a typical day at the office if charges of war crimes didn't bubble up to the high tribunals, accusing soldiers of the other side of various nefarious acts with obscure names such as 'clipping' or 'hax' or what not. It was standard fare for soldiers to die from a direction they did not anticipate in a manner they could not imagine, and conclude that the only explanation was that someone had broken some code of honor. No... it couldn't possibly be that the one that cut them down had appeared in an entirely new location and you, not even contemplating the possibility that someone might move, hadn't protected yourself accordingly!

No, Piercer would have displaced. But not, I think, because he knew my smoke gambit would almost certainly work.

I crawled into another empty hull of a building to catch my breath again. I dried my sweaty palms on my uniform and with the back of my hand wiped the perspiration that was dripping into my eyes. With better clarity of vision, I pulled out my map and searched for a way to test my hypothesis. A quick look through the binoculars sealed the deal. I stowed them away and army-crawled towards a new destination.

It was so quiet and still, I half-thought that maybe Piercer had moved on to a different town, even though that would have been entirely out of character for him. Even as I had the thought, white noise crackled on my radio; someone had pressed and released the 'transmit' button on their radio just long enough to prove that they were still in the area, and close. None of my allies were in the town, so it could only be him. I considered maintaining radio silence so as to keep him guessing, but then I was afraid that if he thought he was finally alone, he would indeed shove off. I clicked my own radio, and continued crawling.

How do you hunt a man who displaces intelligently and takes into account the possibility that his opponent is aware of this, and is likewise hunting you?

One had to assume that Piercer was no longer in his original hide but anticipated that his opponent would feel compelled to rule it out. What would the wise sniper do when he displaced? He would set up in another location that would allow him line of sight over his old position. Where in this city was the best place to snipe into the sniper's old sniper-hide? Answer that, and that is probably where Piercer is now, I reasoned.

I had now crawled over rubble and heaps of iron-shards and other detritus from war in a wide flank to test my hypothesis. I eased my way up the stairs of a three story, red-bricked building, and gently hoisted myself and my gear onto the roof. Very slowly, I lifted my head over the crest. It was exactly the kind of view I was hoping for. While I had a very limited view of the original sniper-hide, I had an excellent view of the building that had the best view of the *approach* to the original sniper-hide.

I saw nothing.

I was suddenly struck with the fear that my own reasoning was being used against me. If he knew that I would check out the sniper-hide, but knew that I knew that he knew that I would check the sniper-hide, then he wouldn't be watching the sniper-hide. He'd have scoped out the location that would have an excellent view of the location that had the best view of the location with the best view to the approach to the sniper-hide. But if he knew that, I knew that he would know that...

I gripped my rifle tightly in my hand and backed down the roof a bit. As discretely as I could, I scanned the area buildings and roofs for the glint of a rifle barrel or the tiniest bit of movement. Seeing nothing, I reasoned that there was nothing for it but to hope that this shrewd warrior was not luring me into an infinite regress--something that I knew was logically impossible, anyway, but could be played out practically speaking until I died of old age on this roof. Besides, the war was waging elsewhere, and I wasn't doing much to contribute to it. Perhaps it would be better to get a bullet in the back of the head and then join my companions on the front.

Even as I had the thought, I decided that pinning down a sniper such as Piercer in a town with no other targets was itself a good contribution to the cause.

I edged my way back up to ridge of the roof. I trained my rifle on the location where my math predicted he would be, and waited.

A few minutes passed and I heard the familiar white noise of the radio clicking. I replied. The fact that we were able to pick up each other's transmissions at all meant that we were within fifty meters of each other. Perhaps I startled him just by virtue of being alive near him, or maybe I had just exhausted his patience, but just at that moment, in the area I hoped he would be, I saw the tip of his rifle move. I didn't even bother to wipe the sweat away from my eyes. This wasn't the time to break concentration, but it required a real act of the will to ignore the rivulets of salt water streaming down my face.

First the tip of the rifle, then the rifle, and now his head. He was on his belly, creeping into a new vantage point. His own weapon was aimed straight at the old sniper-hide. I knew I didn't have long before he displaced or became gripped by the sensation that he was being watched, so as soon as I saw his shoulders... CRACK!

A hint of red followed by his slumped body told me all I needed to know, but what I *wanted* to know was how he felt about the whole thing. I didn't have long to wait--white clouds of expletives poured out of my radio. With deep satisfaction, I retorted with my own puffs of profanity, and let him sort out for himself just what I thought about his comments.

It seemed as though we were going to be exchanging pleasantries all night, and I didn't mind. But then came the report that a JU52 had been spotted dropping leaflets on yet another defenseless town on the edge of the Alsace, and I knew I was needed elsewhere.

*First in, last out.*