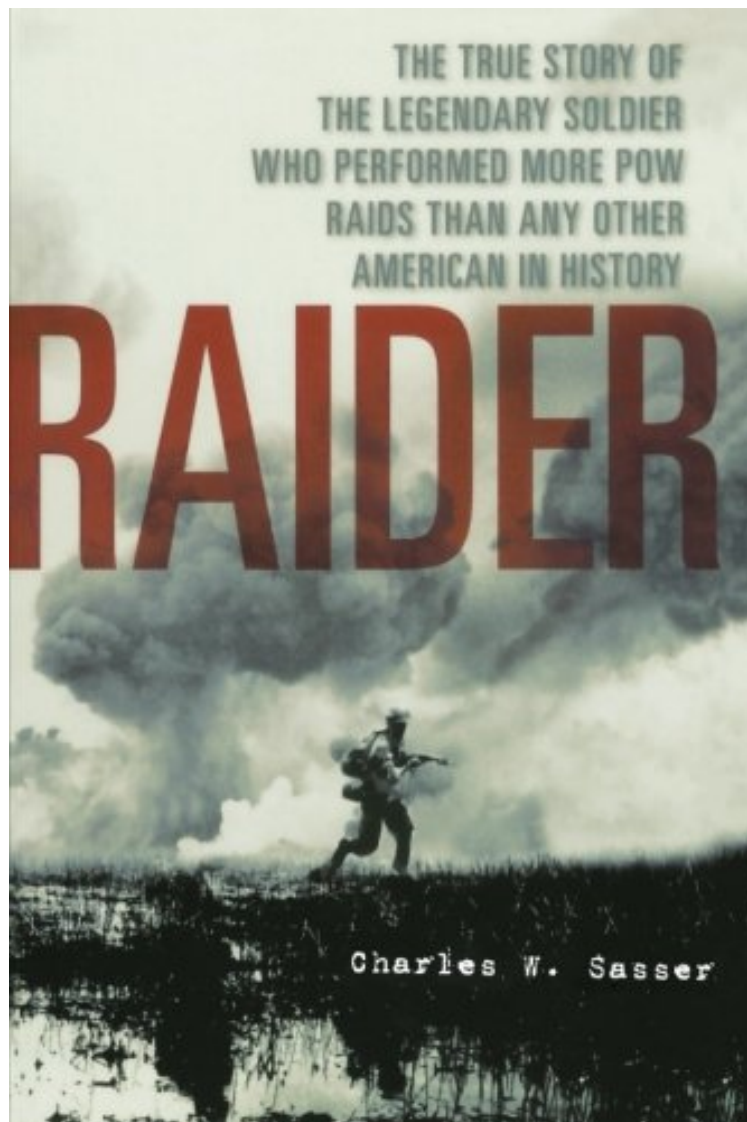


(Free) Raider: The True Story of the Legendary Soldier Who Performed More POW Raids than Any Other American in History

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Charles W. Sasser

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The true story of the legendary soldier who performed more POW raids than any other American in history. He went into battle as a boy. And on one of the most daring missions of World War II, he became a man-- and the perfect soldier for America's next wars... Galen Charles Kittleson was slight, modest, and born to wage war. The son of an Iowa farmer, Kittleson volunteered in 1943 and caught the eye of his commanders. By 1945, PFC Kittleson was selected for the Army's smallest elite unit, the Alamo Scouts. While U.S. forces were pushing back the Japanese in the Pacific, the Alamo Scouts unleashed legendary raids deep behind enemy lines, including the liberation of over 500 starved, beaten prisoners of the Bataan Death March in the Philippines. For Kittleson, a career as a raider had just begun... Charles W. Sasser chronicles the remarkable journey that was Kit Kittleson's courageous life in the service of his country. Now a veteran after first going to war as a boy twenty-five years ago, Kittleson volunteered for one last mission-- the most extraordinary and daring POW raid ever attempted by secret American Special Forces in Vietnam...

"Containing some of the best writing in the field...provides an electrifying glimpse into the dangerous life of a chopper pilot in Vietnam." ?W.E.B. Griffin, Bestselling Author of the Corps Series on Taking Fire "A gripping combat memoir . . . honest and exciting . . . a rousing tale, full of sharp detail and told in the harsh language of soldiers baptized in fire." ?Kirkus "Everybody who survived ground combat in Vietnam had his life saved at one time or another by helicopter crews. We were in awe of them. You will be too after reading Taking Fire." ?Jim Morris, author of War Story and The Devil's Secret Name "An honest and exciting narrative of the stress of war." ?Library Journal "[Sasser and Alexander] succeed quite well in evoking the Vietnam War from the point of view of a helicopter pilot who served bravely and with distinction." ?Publishers Weekly About the Author Charles W. Sasser is a decorated Vietnam veteran and Green Beret, as well as one of today's most respected military and true crime writers. He has authored more than a dozen books, including Taking Fire and One Shot, One Kill. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One There was no moon at the moment, but there would be one later. It would be red and menacing like the Japanese Rising Sun, and it would ride low on the watery horizon of the wartime Pacific, building a bloody shimmering boulevard across the sea to the two PT boats whose navy crews would await the outcome of the raid. Aboard the PT boats in the near-total pre-moon darkness, two teams of 6th Army Alamo Scouts--thirteen elite soldiers--prepared to slip over the PT gunnels into a pair of rubber boats. Dark-skinned native New Guinea guides in khaki shorts lay on their bellies, one guide on each patrol boat, and attempted to steady the rubber craft that bounced alongside on a roughening sea. Dutch Coastwatcher Louie Rapmund, a skinny sunburned man wearing an Aussie hat with one side of the brim turned up, stepped back and braced himself against the PT cockpit. He rebelled against being among the first into the unsteady rubber boats. "Mate, I never been much at riding bucking brumbies," he whispered to the dark shadow of the Scout next to him. "You get used to it," the Scout replied. "Like a toothache?" the Dutchman said. There was no further conversation. Rapmund stayed out of the way of the Scouts' preparations and watched. He accompanied the raiding party only because he spoke the local native lingo and because it was to him the native had come after escaping from the Japanese. The man told of how a former Dutch governor, his family, and their Japanese workers--sixty-six men, women, and children in all--were being held by the Japs at slave labor in the village of Maori on Cape Oransbari in the Vogelkop area of northwestern New Guinea. General Douglas MacArthur's headlong rush of island-hopping to retake New Guinea and keep his promise to return to the Philippines had resulted in isolating more than 200,000 Japanese troops in pockets of resistance throughout northern New Guinea. Within these pockets, Japanese soldiers retained "prisoners of war," most of whom were Melanesian, Dutch, and Australian planters and their families--forced labor for the Emperor's army. "We have a good chance to rescue at least one batch of them," Lieutenant Bill Nellist had explained in a pre-mission briefing to his Scout team six days earlier at the Navy PT boat base on Woendi Island. Nellist bent over a map of the Vogelkop, his tall figure resembling a stork's intent on pouncing on a fish. A kerosene lamp burned on a map table, around which gathered the other six members of the team. Their shadows loomed on the tent walls. "This is Maori," he said, jabbing a finger at the map. "PT boats will insert our team and Rounsaville Team on Cape Oransbari about three miles from the village. Guides will take us there through the jungle. We expect about thirty Japs at the village. But, fellas, there's a Jap garrison about twenty miles away with two thousand other heavily-armed Nip troops. We can't afford to screw up. We have to get in fast, kick ass, and get out of there with the prisoners." It was 28 September 1944. The Nellist and Rounsaville Teams had graduated from 6th Army's Alamo Scouts on 6 September. For the past three weeks, Scout operations officers like John M. "Jack" Dove

had used the new teams sparingly to break them in--overnighters reconnoitering areas of light occupation by the Japanese, quick missions to contact Coastwatchers or to question natives. The fledgling Scouts chafed at the bit, eager to stretch their legs and run. They had been trained and trained hard to infiltrate and operate behind enemy lines in small six- and seven-man guerrilla elements: reconnoitering Jap installations; blowing up barges and truck convoys; sabotaging enemy movements; training natives to spy, sabotage, and raise hell with the Nips. They were ready to get on with their part of the war. Jack Dove was a husky six-foot two-hundred-pounder from Hollywood, California. Handsome enough to be a movie star--say, a John Wayne type--he flashed a constant boy-next-door grin. "You'll all get your chance to fight the Japs," he reassured the new Scouts. The Oransbari raid promised to test the Nellist and Rounsaville Teams. It was their first real mission. "We're going to lose our virginity," hooted Willie Wismer. "You are too ugly to lose yours," big Gilbert Cox hooted back. Twice before during the past four nights the raiders had attempted landings. The first time a sudden squall prevented the teams from departing Woendi. On the second attempt, one of the PT boats tasked with transporting the raiders struck a floating palm and twisted its screws. Tonight, however, looked to be a "go." The PT boats' big Packard engines idled almost without noise, their exhausts underwater and therefore muffled. The boats were grungy, battle-scarred, rat-ridden, cockroach-infested 80-footers with high prows, each armed with four torpedo tubes, a .50-caliber mounted machine gun and an anti-aircraft gun. Waves pounded and sucked against the plyboard hulls. Wave action tossed each rubber boat high and against its mother ship with a slithering sound. Private First Class Galen Kittleson knelt on the deck of his PT and reeled in the rubber raft by its painter. For Christ's sake, where is it? It was that dark. He flopped out on his belly next to the native guide and reached over the side to find the raft. He felt wet rubber and made out the little boat's outline. No more hesitation. He grabbed his .45 Thompson submachine gun and sprang with it into the rubber boat. Waves bounced it up to receive him. He sprawled backwards, but sponged to his feet and steadied the boat against the PT for the others to board. "Move it!" hissed team leader Lieutenant Nellist. The five other soldiers of Nellist Team--Tech Five Willie Wismer, Corporal Andy Smith, Staff Sergeant Tommie Sison, Private First Class Gilbert Cox, Private First Class Sabas Asis--pounced in with Kittleson, using his body to steady themselves while they found positions. The native guide nimbly piled in on top, while Rapmund the Coastwatcher would have gone overboard had Nellist not grabbed his battle harness. Big Gilbert Cox took over and wedged the Dutchman between Asis and Wismer at the bow. Lieutenant Nellist and a private named Hill were the last aboard. Hill and Jack Dove in the other boat would return the rubber rafts to the patrol boats. By this time Rounsaville Team had loaded its rubber raft. Kittleson grabbed a paddle and pushed off from the PT boat. It disappeared almost instantly into the darkness. The two rafts bobbed low in the water, rising and falling together, their occupants paddling almost side by side to maintain contact. Kittleson peered ahead into the South Pacific night. He either saw the darkened incline of land dead ahead or it was his imagination. He dipped his paddle deep and threw his shoulders into the resistance. The Tommy gun rested across his thighs, always within reach. Kittleson was a diminutive soldier, barely five-four on a tall day. At nineteen years old, he was the youngest fighter in the elite Alamo Scouts. Despite his age and size, however, the farmer kid from the Iowa cornbelt had already won a Silver Star for Valor by single-handedly knocking out a Jap machine gun on Noemfoor. The kid had volunteered for the army and had volunteered for the paratroops. Now, in volunteering for the Alamo Scouts, he had volunteered for the most hazardous missions the army could throw at him in the fight against the Japs. Before, while he was in action with the 503d Parachute Regiment, U.S. 6th Army, the other GIs treated him almost as a good luck amulet. "Kit" Kittleson, they said, only half jokingly, lived a charmed life, and that charm protected his buddies. Kittleson knew better. It wasn't charm; it was faith. His was a simple and direct faith. On the PT boat en route, he had bowed his head and silently asked the protection of God for himself, the other raiders, and the prisoners they were attempting to rescue. And now he was ready. Ahead, breakers shallowed into shimmering white foam, creating an eerie phosphorescent effect in the black night. The rafts together shot into a small protected cove. Their bottoms scraped on coral. Looking like a child's stick figure, Nellist sprang from the boat into the surf. The others followed. The hulking figure of Gilbert Cox slapped Kittleson on the butt as the team waded quickly ashore. Even the night birds went silent for the landing. The beach was only about a yard wide, one step between the saltwater and the beginning of tropical rain forest. A black wall. Kit dropped to one knee with Cox at arm's reach on one side and Asis on the other; he was damp from the ocean spray. No one spoke, not even a whisper. Voices carried long distances at night. Even sweating when you were behind enemy lines seemed deafening. It was up to Rapmund and the natives to find the footpath. Kit asked God to have mercy on the souls of those who must die tonight. Copyright © 2002 by Charles W. Sasser. All rights reserved.