



TOP FIFTY  
ACTION HEROES

4

SYLVESTER STALLONE

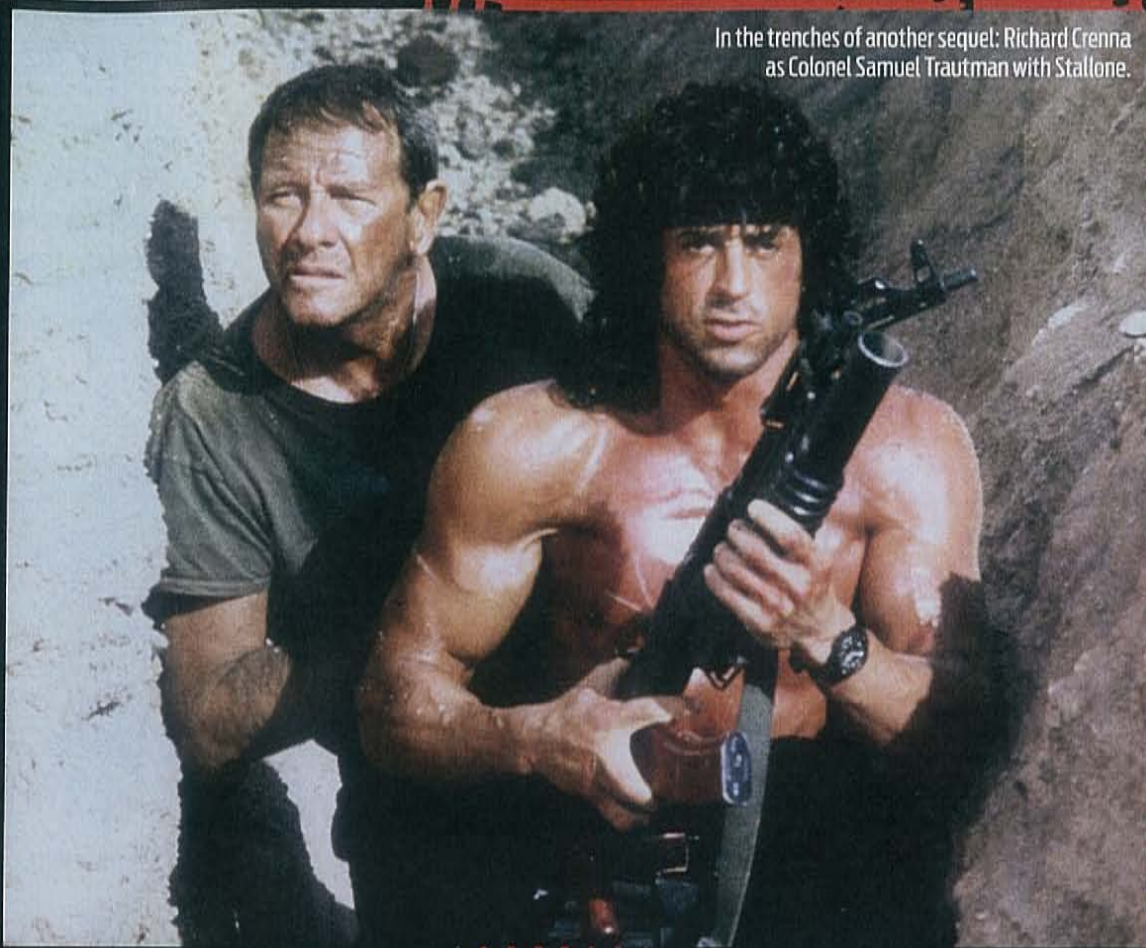
# JOHN RAMBO

AN ARMY OF ONE.

BY NATHAN LEE ADAMUS

Rambo III

PHOTO BY TRISTAR/GETTY IMAGES



In the trenches of another sequel: Richard Crenna as Colonel Samuel Trautman with Stallone.

PHOTO BY TRISTAR/GETTY IMAGES

**B**efore California street gangs were rocking colored doo rags, there was John Rambo, single-handedly dissecting enemies with his dark, curly-haired mane swinging beneath a red bandana. He was, after all, the *First Blood*—not the second. He was a cunning killer, a trained assassin, a ticking time bomb, and also a tormented soldier trying to suppress the pain of a lengthy tour in Vietnam.

To those who haven't seen *First Blood*, the name Rambo conjures images of a knife-wielding maniac with a compound bow that fires exploding arrows. All they see is the long hair, the rocket launcher, the perfectly oiled pectorals charred by fresh gunpowder. There is no mystery in this version of Rambo. He has lots of guns, he's constantly misplacing his t-shirts, and he can take out an entire platoon with the fishing line hidden inside the handle of his industrial-sized Swiss Army Knife.

The public misconception of Rambo as a testosterone-infused vigilante isn't entirely without merit. After the hero's 1982 debut, Rambo's character became more mercenary than misunderstood. He transitioned from the hunted in *First Blood* to the hunter in *First Blood Part II* and *Rambo III*.

The lonely drifter in search of a peaceful life was eventually overshadowed by the bicep-bulging jungle desperado that became the face of the franchise. Even as the latter films attempted to disguise Rambo's angst beneath a chiseled exterior, it was the epic debut that painted the most vivid portrait of the character and helped us empathize with his plight.

**"I don't think you understand. I didn't come to rescue Rambo from you. I came here to rescue you from him."**

—Samuel Trautman (*First Blood*)

### First Blood

Rambo first appeared in David Morrell's 1972 novel *First Blood*. The film does tweak some of Morrell's content, but for the most part, the two works are very similar. In the theatrical version, Rambo is a Vietnam War POW and a former member of an advanced Army Special Forces unit. During his captivity, he is tortured and witnesses the death of most of his platoon at the hands of the North Vietnamese. After escaping the prison camp, and eventually returning home to the states, he is disheartened to find that he and his

### MOVIES

*First Blood* (1982)  
*Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)  
*Rambo III* (1988)  
*Rambo* (2008)

fellows soldiers are openly criticized by the American public for their participation in the Vietnam War. As Rambo attempts to re-acclimate, he soon realizes that his dream of living a simple life may not be attainable with his violent past, especially when society is quick to reject him.

### Rambo's Recent Return

In 2008, after a 20-year Rambo hiatus, Stallone returned to write, direct, and star in a follow-up to *Rambo III*, titled *Rambo*. After omitting character development in favor of a more unbridled action hero in *First Blood Part II* and *Rambo III*, Stallone decided it was time to revisit Rambo's roots.

Although Rambo's inner conflict makes a welcome return, don't expect a reduction in over-the-top action sequences. It is, without question, the bloodiest of all the Rambo films and is often considered one of the most violent movies of all time.

If you have yet to check out Rambo's modern-day resurrection, be prepared to see things that would make even a graveyard-shift surgeon cringe.

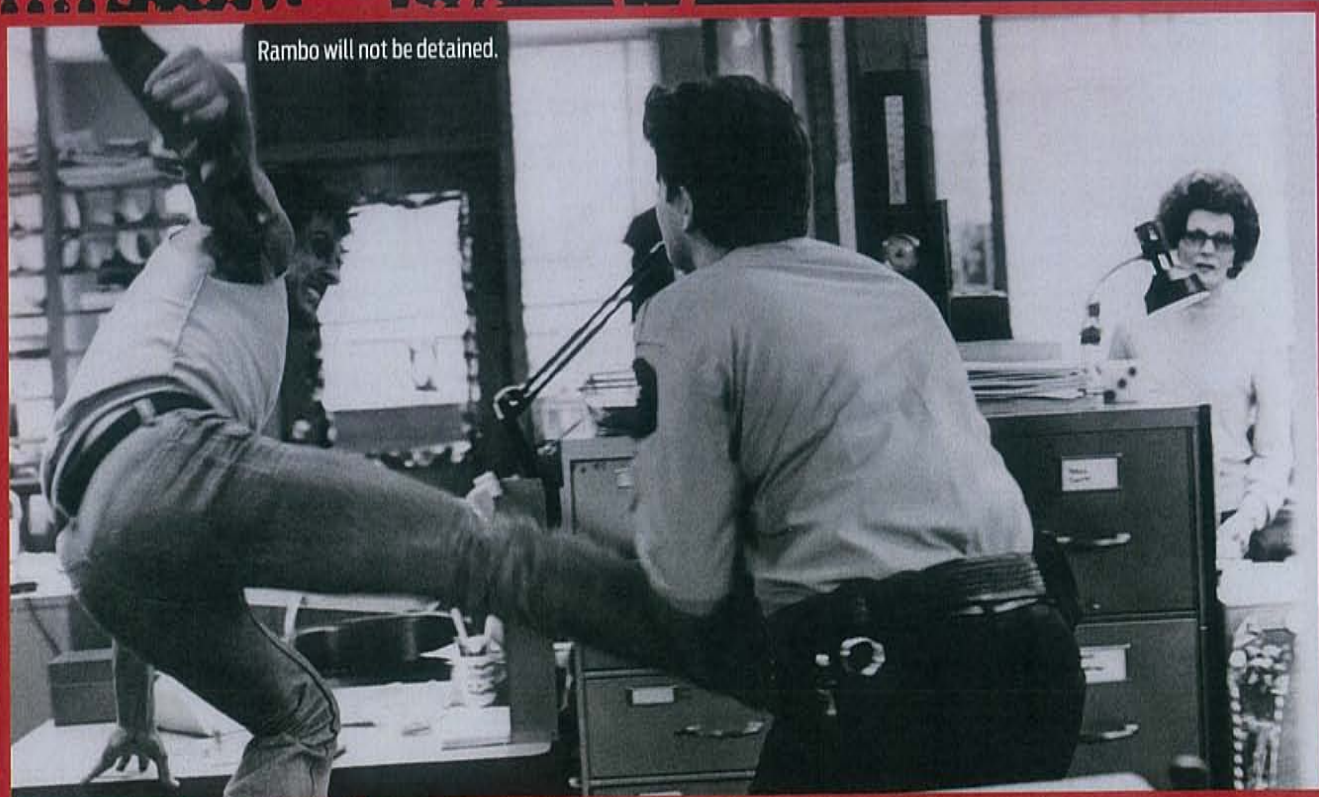
**Col. Trautman:** "This mission is over, Rambo. Do you understand me? This mission is over!"

**Rambo:** "Nothing is over! Nothing! You just don't turn it off! It wasn't my war. You asked me, I didn't ask you. I did what I had to do to win."



Brian Dennehy (right) arrests Rambo for vagrancy in *First Blood*.

PHOTO BY ORION/GETTY IMAGES



Rambo will not be detained.

PHOTO BY ORION/GETTY IMAGES

## The M60 Heavy Machine Gun



Soldiers covering fire with an M60 machine gun, Vietnam, 1966.

Seen during the adrenalin-spiked climax of *First Blood*, the M60 was capable of dispensing 600, 7.62 mm rounds in a minute. Although not exactly a hog at 23 pounds, it was nicknamed "The Pig" during the Vietnam War for its long barrel and cumbersome size. Although Rambo has no problem operating it with one arm, it was usually manned by a team of up to three soldiers, including an ammunition bearer.

## *First Blood Part II* (1985)



Soldiers covering fire with an M60 machine gun, Vietnam, 1966.