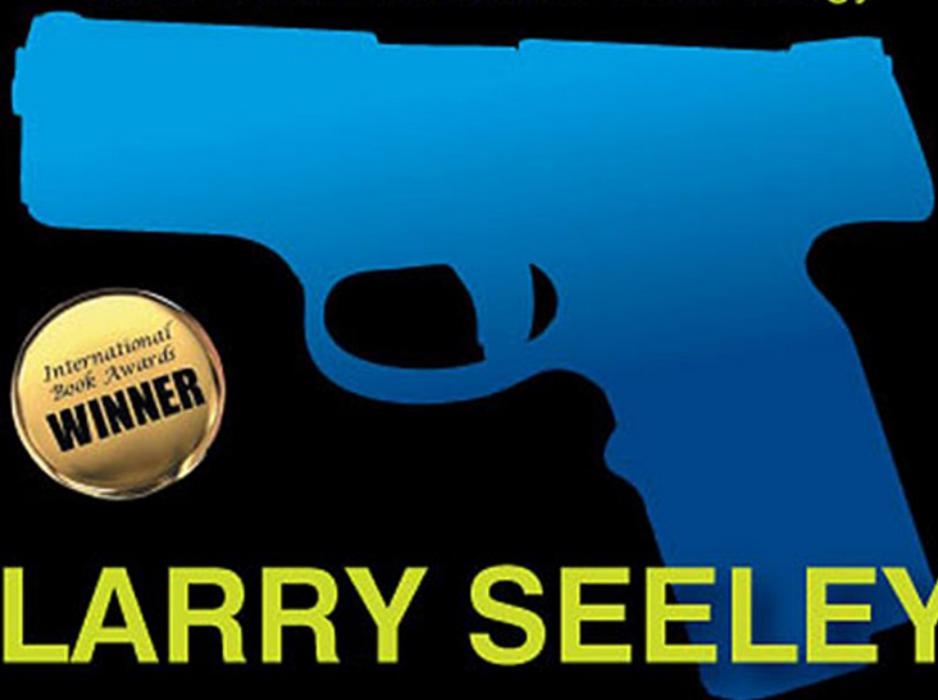


A Jack Sloan Novel

17  
DEGREES  
NORTH

Book Two of The Border Wars Trilogy



LARRY SEELEY

# **17 Degrees North**

## **A Jack Sloan Novel**

By  
Larry Seeley



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*For Katie, my partner in crime*



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## 17 Degrees, 3 Minutes North

The latitude of the border that separates Juarez, Mexico  
from El Paso, Texas is 34 Degrees North—  
17 Degrees for each city—  
two cities that share the same soul.



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## **PART 1**

### **Jack Sloan**

*Pancho was a bandit boy, horse as fast as polished steel,  
Wore his gun outside his belt, for all the honest world to feel.  
Pancho met his fate you know, on a desert in New Mexico,  
No one heard his dying words,  
Ah, but that's the way it goes.\**

\*Pancho and Lefty by Townes Van Zandt (1972)



## CHAPTER 1

### The Assassin

“**M**ake the first shot count and get out,” were his employer’s instructions. For insurance, he loaded the rifle’s magazine to capacity with twenty rounds. One shot or not, no way the target survives. He guaranteed his work and hated to make refunds.

He ran his fingers down the top of the SIG SG 550-1 Sniper rifle. A thing of beauty, it had set him back fifteen grand, fifty percent more than retail, but U.S. law banned its sale to anybody except cops or military. He checked the settings on the Kahles ZFM 10X range-finding scope attached to the top of the weapon. Four hundred yards—a difficult but not impossible shot for a marksman with his skill. He locked the collapsible bipod barrel support into place, eased it onto the flat rock in front of him, and adjusted the rifle stock to his shoulder. The bullets, .223 seventy-five grain Hornady TAP rounds, would speed to the target at twenty-eight hundred feet per second. Impact would be brutal.

The decision to make the kill here had surprised him. He knew the territory, but not the precise topography. The direction the target would come from had dictated his shooting platform.

The hazy day made the landscape jump. Heat rose off the mesa fronting the Jemez Mountains and reminded him of Baghdad. He’d told the army psychiatrist about his father, but the jerk said it didn’t excuse him wasting civilians and booted him on a mental. He missed Special Ops, but he’d earn more today than he could in twenty years in the service.

He used the scope to scan the horizon. The mark came into view a mile or more off. Damn the sun, it had popped from behind a cloud and cut into his field of fire. The shadow might throw him off, and thunderheads moving in from the west could ball things up. Flexibility, he reminded himself. In this business, a shooter's most vital attribute. His skin felt cool and contained. No perspiration and no nerves, even after he took the precaution of donning the rain slicker poncho that he'd pulled from his backpack.

He checked out the landscape and spotted a suitable vantage point about thirty degrees to the right. A towering rock formation would deflect the sun and the rain, if and when it came. He cradled the rifle in his arms and duck-walked to the site.

He felt no wind, but through the scope he saw tumbleweeds skittering down the valley a few hundred yards away. A faint breeze struck his cheek. He knew the seasonal monsoons reared up without warning in this part of New Mexico. The small caliber rounds and the muzzle velocity of his rifle would mitigate much of a storm's effect, but he might need to make a windage adjustment. Thunder shook the sky and he realized he could take his shots without fear of detection if he timed them with the lightning bolts. He counted to himself after the next one. "One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand..." There, that's it. Strike, wait three seconds, kaboom.

The new ambush site suited him. He found a solid platform for the rifle's tripod, and the field of fire looked good. No, not good, excellent. His target drew to within a half mile, and he commenced to sight in the weapon. The Kahles scope accounted for bullet drop once he dialed in the range and estimated wind affect. It made his job easy.

The storm struck with a fury. The sun disappeared and the sky went black. He pulled the extended poncho over his head. It covered the rifle scope so that only the front lens protruded. The cowling around the glass protected it from the rain.

Patience. Deep, slow breaths, and don't get excited. He'd done this dozens of times, but the rush still came. He ached to

hear the explosion and feel the recoil and watch through the scope when the target's head exploded.

Lightning. *One thousand one, one thousand two...* Closer now, the count quicker. He watched while the range lessened. Drops of scattered rain grew into large wet spots on his fatigues. Five hundred yards. Closing faster than expected. A bullet nestled in the chamber, and the gun's firing pin sat poised to strike. The wind howled and tried to lift him from the ground, but the outcropping protected him from the brunt of the storm.

Four-ten, four-five, four-one. He squeezed the double-action trigger and the gun came alive in his hands. He watched in fascination when the target's head turned to gravy and the bright crimson spray, magnified through his scope, mushroomed into a cloud. The target flew backwards, propelled by the violent rearward thrust of the bullet that destroyed his skull.

He packed the rifle and scope into a compact carrying case, picked up his spent ordinance, and scanned the ground for anything that might remain to mark his presence. Tracks, but electrician's tape concealed the tread, and his boots would burn in a wood stove before nightfall. Satisfied, he bent his head into the storm and began to walk in the direction of the blacktop two miles distant where a car waited for him.

He thought of the driver and felt an erection push against his pants. He would lie inside of her and whisper the details of the kill into her ear. He fantasized about her response, and his steps quickened.

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