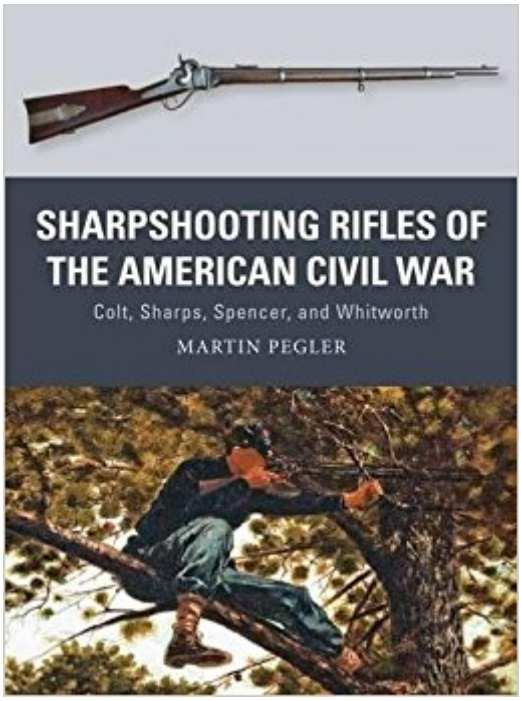
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Sharpshooting Rifles Of The American Civil War: Colt, Sharps, Spencer, And Whitworth (Weapon)



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Synopsis

At the outset of the American Civil War, the wealthy inventor and expert shot Hiram Berdan initiated the setting-up of sharpshooting units in the Union Army; these units would be tasked primarily with open-order skirmishing, but also with long-range, accurate shooting. Initially, it was envisaged that the M1855 Colt revolving rifle would be the weapon employed by these specialists. Available in .36, .44, and .56 caliber, the M1855 swiftly earned a poor reputation, however, as it was prone to a malfunction known as Ã¢â ¬Å“chain fire,Ã¢â ¬Â• in which powder in all the unfired chambers would be ignited, seriously injuring the shooter.Instead, the North's sharpshooters preferred the Sharps rifle, an innovative breech-loading weapon employing a falling-block action. It had double-set triggers, aiding accuracy, and could fire up to ten shots per minute--more than three times the rate of fire offered by the standard-issue Springfield .58-caliber rifled musket. The Sharps was very expensive, though, and military planners believed it would encourage soldiers to waste ammunition. After a prolonged fight with the Ordnance Department, however, Berdan succeeded in procuring Sharps rifles for his men. Other Union sharpshooters were equipped with the standard-issue Springfield rifled musket, the .56-56-caliber Spencer Repeating Rifle--a lever-action weapon with a seven-round tube magazine--or Ã¢â ¬Å“target rifles,Ã¢â ¬Â• basically sporting rifles repurposed for military use.Conversely, the Confederacy favored the Pattern 1853 Enfield rifled musket for its sharpshooters; the South also imported from Britain quantities of the Whitworth Rifle, a .45-caliber, single-shot, muzzle-loading weapon distinguished by its use of a twisted hexagonal barrel. More prone to fouling and slower-firing than the standard-issue rifled musket, the Whitworth offered impressive long-range accuracy; its hexagonal bullets made a distinctive whistling noise in flight. In May 1864 a Confederate sharpshooter armed with the Whitworth famously killed the highest-ranking Union battle casualty of the conflict, Major General John Sedgwick, at a range of about 1,000 yards.Featuring specially commissioned artwork, this is the engrossing story of the innovative rifles that saw combat in the hands of sharpshooters on both sides during the Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Martin Pegler has a BA Hons in Medieval and Modern History and an MA in Museum Studies, both from University College, London, and was for many years the Senior Curator of Firearms at the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds. He is the author of a number of books including The Military Sniper since 1914 (Osprey, 2001), Firearms in the American West 1700-1900 (The Crowood Press, 2002), and the highly acclaimed Out of Nowhere: A History of the Military Sniper (Osprey, 2004), and he has also contributed to a number of magazines.Johnny Shumate works as a freelance illustrator living in Nashville, Tennessee. He began his career in 1987 after graduating from Austin Peay State University. Most of his work is rendered in Adobe Photoshop using a Cintiq monitor. His greatest influences are Angus McBride, Don Troiani, and Ãƒâ douard Detaille.Born in Malaya in 1949, Alan Gilliland spent 18 years as the graphics editor of The Daily Telegraph, winning 19 awards in that time. He now writes, illustrates, and publishes fiction (www.ravensquill.com), as well as illustrating for a variety of publishers (alangillilandillustration.blogspot.com).

American and; to a lesser extent, British forces; had been using rifle armed sharpshooters during the American Revolution, War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. Yet the "War Between The States" was one of the first conflicts in which most of the troops on both sides were armed with rifles, and the first I am aware of in which both opposing armies used large bodies of designated riflemen as sharpshooters. In addition to providing precise descriptions of the various rifles and ammunition as well as of the tactics employed by their users, the author does a good job of describing the general technical evolution of practical rifled firearms suitable for mass issue. Highly recommended for both the enthusiast and general reader.

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