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# A Rifleman Went To War

HERBERT W. MCBRIDE  
**A RIFLEMAN  
WENT TO WAR**  
HOW ONE MAN REVOLUTIONISED  
SNIPING IN WORLD WAR ONE



## Synopsis

From childhood Herbert W. McBride was familiar with rifles, at first watching his father prepare for the hunt, later learning the game himself: he was destined to become a Rifleman. Growing up in Indiana, surrounded by veterans of the Civil War, he followed his father and his father before him into a military life, rising in time to become a Captain. “Missing” two conflicts, when war was declared in 1914 a burning curiosity to find out what a “real war” was like led McBride to resign his commission and head to Canadian forces. Assigned to the 38th Battalion, upon finding out it was slated for garrison duties he transferred to the 21st Battalion, fearing war’s end before he could taste the fire of battle. As a Private in the Machine Gun Section, a rifle always on his shoulder, McBride served in France and Belgium from September 1915 to April 1917. Weaving his experiences and observations into a gripping narrative, his account of his time in the Canadian Corps offers fascinating insight into the role of a Rifleman in WWI. McBride’s emphasis on the use of the military rifle in sniping, its place in modern armament, and the work of the individual soldier is as valuable as the insight given into soldiers’ minds. “A Rifleman Went to War” not only offers a unique insight into the Canadian Corps, and in turn, the British Army of WWI, but also into military science. Albion Press is an imprint of Endeavour Press, the UK’s leading independent digital publisher. For more information on our titles please sign up to our newsletter at [www.endeavourpress.com](http://www.endeavourpress.com). Each week you will receive updates on free and discounted ebooks. Follow us on Twitter: @EndeavourPress and on Facebook via <http://on.fb.me/1HweQV7>. We are always interested in hearing from our readers. Endeavour Press believes that the future is now.

## Book Information

File Size: 1159 KB

Print Length: 314 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1517731828

Publisher: Albion Press (September 1, 2015)

Publication Date: September 1, 2015

Sold by: Â Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B014SRU58C

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #102,090 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #22

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## Customer Reviews

If you enjoy reading first hand military history written by those who have been there, then you are in for a treat and an education with this one. Now the modern reader will have to make a couple of adjustments with this work. I personally love the archaic and dated writing style used in this work...it is sort of my thing, but can see where younger readers may be put off just a bit. It should also be noted that this book in NO WAY is politically correct by today's standards. I actually found this to be quite refreshing. I had uncles and cousins who fought in WWI and grew up listening to their stories (even though they were hesitant to talk of their experiences and rarely did, I found a young and interested kid could get them to open up if they were pestered enough). These old men pretty well told it like it was and held little back. That is what this author has done. I also admit that I enjoyed the obvious "war stories" that the author has liberally sprinkled throughout his text. A great deal of military history and technique can be found in the pages of this book and I am grateful that Kindle made this work available. Note to the younger reader: I realize that the style used during the time this book was written is different but trust me...give it a chance and you will find that you will quickly catch the rhythm and will actually find it rather refreshing compared to some of the crap written these days.

I wish you could rate with half or quarter-stars, as I think four is slightly below what this book deserves, but I'm learning to be much, much more picky with my "fives." With that said, I'll list out the reasons that readers with an interest in World War I, the history of firearms, the history of 20th century warfare, "western" armies (the United States, British Empire and Western Europe) ought to dig this one out and give it a go. 1) This book is most decidedly NOT in the "Lost Generation" style, or literary camp, of WWI writing. This is far from the perspective of "All Quiet on the Western Front," "For Whom the Bell Tolls," "dulce et decorum est," and the form of war writing that most readers are

probably more familiar with, and this is a good thing. Feel free to be offended by McBride's perspective and lack of contemporary political correctness; he's not forlorn, he's not bitter, shell-shocked (at least not so that it comes through in the writing), nor is he jingoistic or bloodthirsty. He writes in the voice of a professional, career soldier both as a national guardsman and a full-time infantryman and machine gunner, someone who's seen several armies at work. He writes as a professional and as an instructor, for the Indiana National Guard, the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and the inter-war US Army. The wording is straightforward, down to earth, realistic, and if it's seems distant, it's because it is the writing of someone who sees the concept of war, training for war, and the conduct of war, as a matter of fact endeavor. He is content to leave the theorizing to others. We can argue for all time whether his perspective is superior or inferior to the much well known style of WWI writing, but what matters to me is that readers see this perspective in addition to the literary one we know and "love."

2) This book is a look inside the mindset of a mid-western American male at the turn of the 20th century, looking back (circa 1932) because he can possibly "sense" the war clouds forming on the horizon again, and writing as someone who saw the good, the bad, the ugly, the brilliant, the brave and the stupid side of war, and pulls no punches in wanting to prepare his countrymen for it. It's surprisingly lacking in guile and comes across as sincere. That lack of irony (though there is quite a bit of snark) is also refreshing.

3) The practicality and value of expertise, earned experience; if you're not a "gun nut" or obsessed with the minutiae of tactics, you'll find a lot in here you'll want to skip and could probably do so with little loss. However, when it comes to descriptions of infantry tactics, trench life, planning and how the men operated on the attack, on the defense, as a unit and as individuals, it might paint a VERY different picture of the Great War than you're used to, and for that reason, this detail is valuable. McBride doesn't skimp on the horror, or the deadlock of the trench, but his description of raiding and other tactics reveals that the Front (at least portions of it) were far from static, stagnant, endless artillery duels, and also far from cinematic "over the top" slaughters. All of those are gross oversimplifications for what was a complicated, difficult war, and the men who fought and led during it were more often than not, NOT the "upper class twit" or "morose Junker" often depicted (though McBride shows enough of both to imply some justification for the stereotypes, especially as he dissects the good and bad of the British "Tommy" and the aristocratic officer class).

4) Most importantly, and alluding back to my first point, he demystifies the war, something that 100 years on we should be very intent on doing. This is not Tuchman's *Guns of August*, this is not poetry, nor is it film, nor is song. This is not the pop culture war, this is a memoir of someone who soldiered, and for whom soldiering was his business. No more, no less. The other books I mentioned are valuable for what they are, and my comments are

not meant to disparage them, but simply to say that you need more than them to understand this conflict and the men that fought it. From a personal perspective, it was a bit both relieving, and disappointing, to see many of the same criticisms of US forces looking back on 100-80 years ago, remain valid today. Relieving because it makes me think we're not all that different (speaking as a servicemember) and disappointing, because we truly don't have "lessons learned," merely "lessons identified."

Told from the perspective of an expert rifleman, a competition shooter before he joined the Canadian Army, and an experienced hunter and outdoors man. This is what separates this story from many others of the time; the author really wanted to go to war, he was an expert shot, he came from a long line of soldiers, his grandfather served in the Mexican War, and his father in the Civil War, he wanted to try his hand at the game. An American, he journeyed North to Canada to volunteer. Not surprisingly, he doesn't have any horror stories to tell, he pretty much knew what he was going to be in for and didn't shrink from the consequences. He writes far more of sniping and the problems of shooting accurately amid the complications of trench warfare than he does of the hardships and sufferings he endured. Indeed, he ridicules the anti-war approach that the movies took after the war. One gets the feeling that the author sort of enjoyed the challenge. Not your ordinary WWI memoir. If you are expecting an anti-war diatribe, this ain't it.

I read this book because I had read somewhere that Col. Jeff Cooper referred to it when describing how his scout rifle concept developed in his mind. Well, it's kind of a stretch to say you've found something in this book that would lead to the modern scout rifle, but I suppose there's at least some little, remote connection. But once I got that expectation out of my head, the book worked pretty well. I like personal accounts of battle, and McBride has a certain aplomb in his style of telling what he experienced and saw, and his opinions about war and battle. I confess, I skimmed through some parts. I read it during the late evening hours and sometimes the author gets to waxing a little too eloquently so I'd cheat some to avoid falling asleep. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. All in all, though, it was a good book, with good insight to what fighting that war was like for the people who actually fought it.

I read this book decades ago, and now obtained and read it again, and it is as interesting as ever. McBride gives details of the war in the trenches, and tells what it was like to be a WWI sniper from the early days (when trench lines were being constructed) until well into the war. The systems that

were set up to detect and localize snipers (including lifelike fake heads), the techniques (that old boot thrown over the wall of the trench might actually have a hole thru its sole that concealed a sniper's peep hole) and so on. A great book.

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