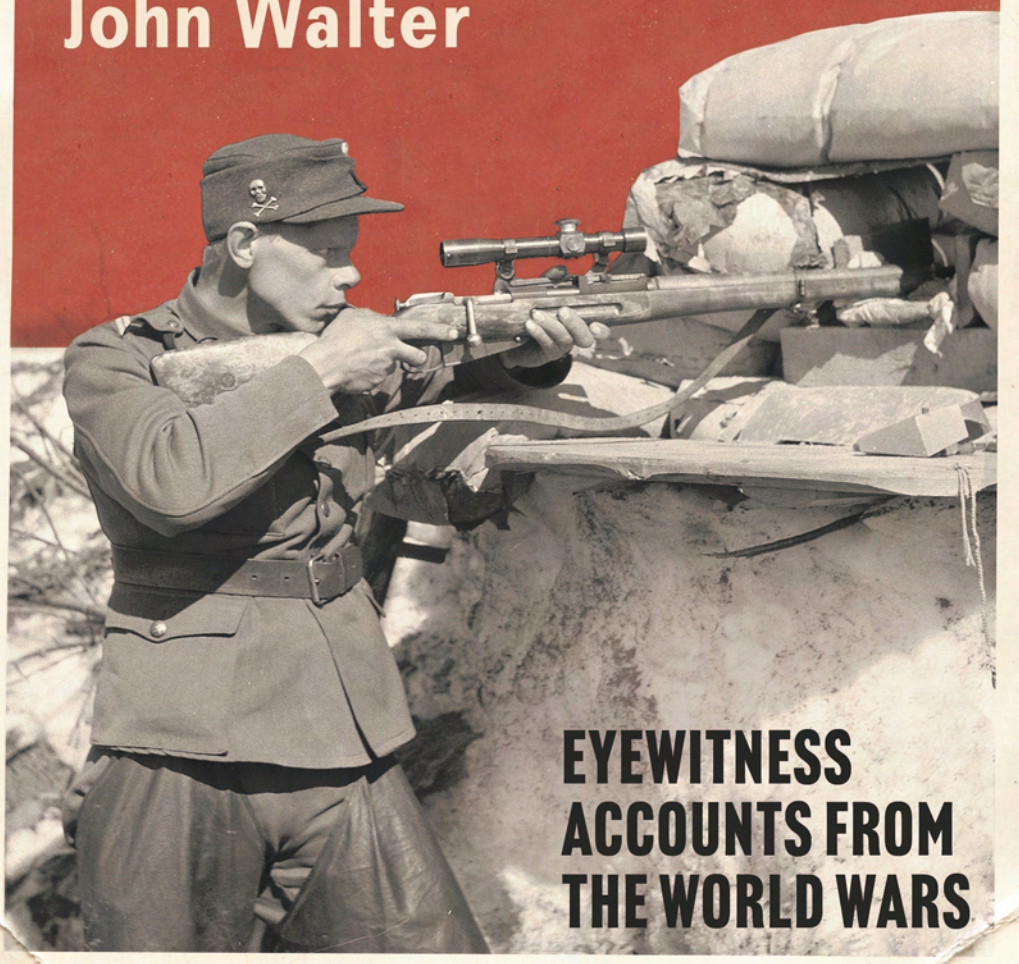
VOICES OF SNIPERS

John Walter



EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS FROM THE WORLD WARS

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Greenhill Books

Voices of Snipers: Eyewitness Accounts from the World Wars

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Note on Russian transliteration

One of the problems of republishing Russian-language memoirs lies in Cyrillic transliteration. Many differing systems have been used over the years, some relying on character-by-character methods and others more on pronunciation. For example, Cyrillic 'E' is sometimes rendered as 'e' and sometimes as 'ye'.

Voices of Snipers uses a character-based system derived from British Standard 2979:1958, but the appended *Roza's Diary* retains the spellings of the original translation. This explains the occasional inconsistency in names such as Aleksandra Yekimova, 'Ekimova' on the standardised scheme.

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FOREWORD

Virtually all of our learned history is second-hand. Historical events are always open to interpretation, even by those who were there at the time, and almost no one is ever able to present a cohesive account of what happened, or even why, until a considerable time after the event. This is never more so than when looking at military history. Understanding a campaign or a single battle can only be done in retrospect, when all of the facts, figures and accounts have been collated and sorted into a chronological history. The problem with this is that generally what the historian then presents is at best an overview of what happened based solely on the accounts of people who were seldom physically present. This is even more true in the twentieth century, when senior commanders rarely set foot on battlefields (Field-Marshal Haig never travelled closer than 16 miles to the Somme front during the battle) relying instead on intelligence reports, maps and photographs to plan and execute their strategies.

John Walter's *Voices of the Snipers* attempts to redress this by using the words and experiences of the snipers themselves, taken from a myriad of books, interviews and memoirs. To undertake such a project is no mean feat, for until well into the 1980s almost nothing was published by snipers on their invisible war. In most military circles it was regarded as a somewhat uncivilised way to wage war and although newspapers published accounts of sniping during and after the First World War, these were mostly embellished and seldom contained any direct quotes from the snipers themselves, who by choice were the most solitary soldiers on the battlefield and who preferred to remain publicly and privately invisible.

Their war was a strange contradiction, being both acutely personal whilst at the same time dispassionate. Unlike any other combatant, they looked at the man they were about to kill, for they literally held the power of life or death in their hands. Even that other solitary hero of the age, the fighter pilot, could convince himself he was shooting at mechanical objects, not human beings. Snipers never had the luxury of this mental shield, for they knew

exactly what the results of their actions would be, and each had to learn to deal with it in their own way. Their war was as far removed from the lofty and indifferent accounts of the generals as it was possible to be. It was not until after the Vietnam War that any first-hand accounts from snipers began to emerge, acting as a balance to the grandiloquent histories of war. Even then, their vital part in defeating the enemy in a hidden war, in which there was no quarter, was largely ignored in terms of military awards.

Of the allied commanders who served in the Second World War, virtually every one received some form of military decoration acknowledging the part they played. Britain's highest scoring sniper, Harry Furness, who fought from the D-Day landings through to Germany and was twice wounded, received no more than the usual four service medals. He was fortunate that he even survived as casualty rates for allied snipers were over 50 per cent killed and wounded. He was the only original sniper in his battalion to reach Germany. For the Russians, their war was even harder; the bitter fighting at Stalingrad meant that a sniper's lifespan was expected to be only two weeks.

This was the gritty reality of the sniping war: figures that became lost in masses of statistics, but tell us nothing about the men who fought or the type of combat they experienced. *Voices* opens a Pandora's box of experiences and clears the 'fog of war' that made it impossible for any combatant to say coherently what had happened except for the few dozen yards on either side of them. They had no idea whether they were beating the enemy or not; if their own localised attack had proved successful, or if they were in fact about to be surrounded. The wider tactical implications were utterly lost on them. Every soldier fought a totally personal war, relying on their immediate comrades to protect their flanks, dealing with each threat as it appeared whilst trying to keep a clear head and a grip on their fear. How this affected them, at the time and in later years, is a fascinating story in itself.

There was another seldom talked about element to the sniping war: unlike ordinary infantrymen in combat, a sniper had little recourse to help if things went awry, for they often fought far in advance of their own lines and faced certain death if captured. It would not necessarily be quick either, particularly on the Eastern Front, and the carrying of a pistol was routine – a bullet in the head was far preferable to the alternatives. It is almost certainly true that very few returned to civilian life the same people that they were before the war, and a few touch on the problems that they faced post-war. Alcohol, depression and the now almost-universal post-traumatic stress disorder took their toll and it is impossible to know how many former snipers succumbed as a result. A few, such as Yuliya Zhukova, author of *Girl With A Sniper Rifle,* write openly about postwar problems. Others, such as Lyudmila Pavlichenco, 'Lady Death',

battled alcohol and died prematurely. In a very moving end to his grim book, *Sniper On The Eastern Front*, Sepp Allerberger said that, despite surviving the war almost physically unhurt, his heart would remain hard for the rest of his life for 'the spectre of war would never let go of him.' This was true for thousands of former snipers, who mostly suffered in silence, unable to seek any professional help, and we would never know their remarkable and often terrifying stories were it not for authors such as John Walter, who must be congratulated on this impressive body of work. He has put together a cohesive history of the darkest and most secretive form of warfare in modern history, as told by those faceless, and often nameless, snipers who have always lived in the shadows.

Martin Pegler
2021

PREFACE

When – having worked on *Snipers at War*, the *Sniper Encyclopaedia* and Roza Shanina's diary – I was asked to put together an intimate view of the subject, I was uncertain if sufficient material existed to present one which was truly even-handed.

Availability of first-hand testimony clearly reflects the differing national views of snipers: from the almost total absence of Japanese recollections to the plethora of Russian memoirs from the Second World War. Comparatively little British and American material is readily available, probably owing to the once-common view of snipers as cold-blooded killers, and the many men who served the German forces are represented principally by the fascinating stories of only three leading marksmen: Josef 'Sepp' Allerberger, Matthäus Hetzenauer and Bruno Sutkus.

But can these recollections be trusted? Having read countless thousands of words, I feel that their veracity can sometimes be questioned. There are honourable exceptions, of course: Frederick Crum kept a day-by-day diary and the story of Bruno Sutkus, for example, is based on his surviving highly detailed wartime logbook.

Some of the memoirs are low-key personal testimonies, which for the most part ring true. Yet there are others in which the work of propagandists, political masters and exploitative editors can be discerned. Several Russian snipers subsequently pursued careers in which the state was directly involved, and their views can reflect an understandable tendency to avoid criticising the leadership of the USSR.

The atrocities that inevitably occur in wartime generally receive little more than passing mention in Russian accounts, but one of the German memoirs gives details with such precision that the material may have been deliberately sensationalised. While I can accept that the incidents occurred, claiming to remember what was said word-for-word, at second hand and often in a language foreign to the sniper, should be questioned.

Voices of Snipers elects to tell a story from beginning to end, from volunteering or impressment to death or discharge, illuminated by first-hand commentaries from not only snipers but also trainers such as Frederick Crum, Hesketh Prichard and Herbert McBride – shooting enthusiasts with skills proven in combat. The rise of sniping has been explained only briefly, much more detail being accessible elsewhere (see Bibliography). However, historical elements occasionally appear, to reflect the effects on sniping as the First World War stagnated in the trenches of the Western Front, or on the heights of Gallipoli peninsula, to the desperation of the Red Army's push across Europe and the island-by-island advance by Allied forces in the Pacific.

Inevitably, the selection of quotes, with so much material to choose from, has been essentially personal. But I hope that those that have been used will guide you, the reader, through the story in such a way that you feel you're actually partaking in the snipers' experience!

One of the most shocking elements of the story is the youth of many participants: still in their teens or early twenties, many men and women chose or were forced to endure the horrors of war. Some paid the ultimate price, while others made it to the end. For many, however, the psychological scars never healed, no matter how many reunions they attended and how much rehabilitation was undertaken.

My work could not have been completed without help. Consequently, apart from 'globally thanking' those who have allowed snippets of memoirs and personal testimonies to be used, I would like to express particular gratitude to Lionel and Michael Leventhal, David Foreman, Martin Pegler, Ian Skennerton, Charles Sasser, Leroy Thompson, Dina Nikolaeva, Yuliya Zhukova and Alla Begunova. And editor Steve Williamson found many things that had eluded the author!

For help with images: Hermann Historica, Morphy Auctions and Rock Island Auctions.

And, last but not least, all the usual suspects: Alison, Adam, Nicky, Findlay, Georgia and Holly, plus Amber and new addition Maggie!

John Walter
2021

OUR CHRONICLERS

Detailed biographical information concerning entries marked '⁎' will be found in *The Sniper Encylopaedia*.

Josef 'Sepp' Allerberger ⁎ (1924–2010), subject of Albrecht Wacker's *Sniper on the Eastern Front* (2005), joined the German Army in August 1943. Serving with Gebirgs-Jäger-Regiment 144, his tally of 257 kills from 1 September 1944 until the end of the war is second only to that of Matthäus Hetzenauer. Consequently, he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 20 April 1945. His memoirs were published in Germany in 2000 as *Im Auge des Jäger* but names were changed to preserve the anonymity of men who were still alive; however, the English-language edition correctly identified most of the participants.

Rem Altshuller, born in 1926 to a soldier and a school teacher, volunteered for service in Leningrad immediately after the German invasion of the USSR. Though under-age, he was able to persuade recruiters of the value of his apparent knowledge of German – Altshuller was Jewish, with Yiddish and German being sufficiently closely related to make his claim acceptable. He was also holder of the Voroshilov marksmanship badge, suiting him to the sniper's role for which he had soon qualified, but he spent much of his time as an interrogator as his units advanced to the Reich.

Nevill Alexander Drummond Armstrong (1874–1954), author of *Fieldcraft, Sniping and Intelligence* (1941), served as Chief Instructor of the 2nd Army School of Scouting, Observation and Sniping in 1915–16, Commandant of the Canadian Corps School of Scouting, Observation and Sniping (1917–18), and then as Chief Reconnaissance Officer. A member of the Royal Geographical Society, Armstrong was awarded the OBE for his services.

Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean (1879–1968), a war correspondent/historian, is now best remembered as editor of the 12-volume *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, which includes material devoted to Gallipoli.

Pyotr Alekseevich Belyakov ⁎, born in 1927, underwent military training during his last year at school. Conscripted in 1942, his prowess as a marksman ensured he was sent for training as a sniper. Beginning service near Stalingrad at the end of 1942, he reached the Dnepr river in November 1943 but was then wounded badly enough to cease sniping, with a tally said to have amounted to 147.

Alan Johnston Campbell (1895–1982), who gave details to John Hamilton for use in *Gallipoli Sniper*, served as a trooper with the Australian 2nd/5th Light Horse.

Daniel Webster Cass Jr (1916–2011), contributor to Charles Sasser and Craig Roberts's *One Shot – One Kill* (1990), served in the US Marine Corps as a sniper in the Second World War.

Frederick Maurice Crum ⁎ (1872–1955), author of *Memoirs of a Rifleman Scout*, passed out of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and duly served in India and South Africa. Severely wounded during the Battle of Talana Hill, he was invalided home but subsequently returned to South Africa. A chance meeting with Robert Baden-Powell persuaded Crum to leave military service to devote time to the Boy Scout movement in Scotland. Rejoining the army when war began, service in the trenches in France once again compromised his health. In May 1916, therefore, he was sent to Acq to organise a brigade-level sniping school, which was successful enough to persuade General Skinner to move Crum and his staff to brigade headquarters in Arras to oversee the work of snipers and intelligence-gatherers. Returning to Britain in poor health, Crum was appointed 'Scouting and Sniping Expert G.H.Q. France', wrote *Scouting, Sniping and Observation* for limited circulation and, on 17 May 1917, took over co-ordination of scouting and sniper training throughout the army.

Thomas Oram Durst (1889–1964), listed as a Civil Service clerk in the 1911 census, serving as a private and then 'acting corporal' in the King's Royal Rifle Corps during the First World War. His reminiscences were used by Martin Pegler in *Sniping in the Great War*.

Fyodor Trofimovich Dyachenko ⁎, born in the Ukraine in 1917, settled in the Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia when his family were deported after being denounced as 'kulaks' (suspiciously wealthy peasants). Conscripted in May 1942, Dyachenko impressed his trainers with marksmanship and, after being sent to the Leningrad Front, was given a sniper rifle. Initially facing Spanish troops sent by Franco to fight for Germany, and later Waffen-SS units, he was seriously wounded early in 1944. Said to have amassed 425 kills, principally while serving with the 187th Rifle Regiment, awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union on 21 February 1944, Dyachenko became a political officer and served the army until retiring in 1962.

Denis Ivo Exley Edwards (1924–2008), author of *The Devil's Own Luck*, based on a diary kept after D-Day, trained as a scout-sniper with the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Attached to the 6th Air Landing Brigade, he was among those dropped by glider on the night of 5/6 June 1944 to capture Pegasus Bridge over the river Orne, and then took part in the thrust across Europe to Germany.

John Mark Fulcher (1913–89), one of many snipers featured in Charles Sasser and Craig Roberts's *One Shot – One Kill*, was born in Texas to German-Irish and Cherokee parents. He enlisted in the US Army in December 1942 after serving with the National Guard, and, once marksmanship training had been completed, was sent to Italy – landing at Salerno with the 36th Division in September 1943. Discharged from service in October 1944, Fulcher was the eldest of five brothers serving during the Second World War.

Harry Mitchell Furness ⁎ (born in 1925), after transferring from the Home Guard in 1943 served as a sniper with the York & Lancaster Regiment, and is now credited with 117 kills. His reminiscences of service were used by Martin Pegler in *Out of Nowhere* and *Sniping in the Great War.*

John Benjamin George (1918–2009), author of *Shots Fired in Anger*, joined the US Army towards the end of 1941. A first-class shot, eventually rising to lieutenant-colonel's rank, George served as an infantry unit commander at Guadalcanal and in North Burma. His highly regarded memoir recalls experience as a rifleman in the Guadalcanal campaign.

Boris Godov, son of a priest, was born in 1920 in Ivanovo district near Moscow. Enlisting in 1935 in a 'musical regiment', Godov served in the Winter War with

a Ukrainian assault brigade. Subsequently re-training as a political-education officer and first-aider, he demonstrated sufficient aptitude for shooting to be given a Tokarev rifle and sent on a sniping course. Seriously wounded in the autumn of 1941 while serving on the Ugra river, his sniping career then gave way to reconnaissance duties.

Julian Henry Francis Grenfell ⁎ (1888–1915), son of William Grenfell, Baron Desborough, was commissioned into the Royal Dragoons in 1910. When the First World War began, the Dragoons were sent to northern France. On 1 January 1915, already an experienced sniper and twice mentioned in despatches, Grenfell was awarded the DSO for his gallantry. On 13 May, however, while observing enemy positions, he was struck in the head by a shell fragment and died on 26 May.

Simo Häyhä ⁎ (1905–2002), a farmer's son, joined the Protective Corps in 1922 and then served the Finnish Army until 1927. When the Winter War began, Häyhä was posted to 34. Jääkärirykmentti. He is now generally credited with 505 sniper kills (some sources claim 542), but his front-line career was cut short by a Russian bullet that took away part of his jaw. Tapio Saarelainen details his remarkable story in *The White Sniper Simo Häyhä*.

Matthäus Hetzenauer ⁎ (1924–2004), born in the Austrian Tyrol, was sent for training with Gebirgs-Ersatz-Bataillon 140 in September 1942, temporarily released and then recalled to service in January 1943. Graduating in July 1944 from a marksmanship course in Steiermark in Seetaler Alpen, and serving on the Carpathian Front with Gebirgs-Jäger-Regiment 144, Hetzenauer's final tally of 346 was unmatched by any other Wehrmacht sniper. Captured in May 1945, he survived captivity in the USSR to return home in 1950.

Oliver Hogue (1880–1919), 'Trooper Bluegum', was an Australian army officer who reported for the *Sydney Morning Herald* during the Gallipoli campaign. His reports were subsequently collected as *Love Letters of an Anzac* and *Trooper Bluegum at the Dardanelles*, both published in 1916. Sent to England after contracting dysentery, he died from the effects of influenza.

Albert Huxford (1897–1955), 'Gardener's Boy' according to the 1911 census, served in the Royal Berkshire Regiment during the First World War, duly qualifying as a sniper. His reminiscences were used by Martin Pegler in *Sniping in the Great War*.

Ion 'Jack' Llewellyn Idriess ⁎ (1889–1979), spent his formative years in rural New South Wales. When the First World War began, Idriess joined the 5th Light Horse Regiment and was sent to Gallipoli where he acted as observer for Billy Sing. Beginning in 1927, Idriess wrote 50 books, which include *The Desert Column*, an account of his service in Gallipoli and Palestine, and a series of training manuals for the Australian Army including *Shoot to Kill* and *Lurking Death*.

Mariya Dimitrievna Kataeva (Bondarenko) ⁎, born in 1925 near Moscow, was working on a collective farm when she tried to enlist as a sniper in 1942 – an effort which lasted until 1943. Graduating from the Central Women's Sniper School in March 1944, she was sent to serve with the 179th Rifle Regiment on the 1st Belorussian Front and was badly wounded several times before ending the war in Königsberg with an unverifiable tally of 28 kills (some sources claim 80) and the second and third classes of the Order of Glory.

Antonina Aleksandrovna Kotlyarova (Zakharova) gave an interview to Artem Drabkin in 2009, and also features in Andrey Ulanov's *Stalkers of the Enemy*. Serving with 47th Army after graduating from the women's sniper school, she received the Order of Glory third class, recognising ten kills, but her final score may have been considerably higher.

Nina Alekseevna Lobkovskaya ⁎ was born in 1925 in the Siberian village of Fyodorovka, and volunteered for military service in April 1943. One of the first cohort of the Principal School for the Training of Female Snipers, she proved an outstanding pupil. Sent to the front with the 21st Guards Rifle Division of 3rd Shock Army, she not only ended the war with 89 kills, but was placed in command of an all-female sniper section in February 1945. Demobilised in August 1945, Nina Lobkovskaya related her sniper story in interviews given in 1997 and again in 2009.

Herbert Wesley McBride ⁎ (1873–1933), author of *The Emma Gees* (1918) and *A Rifleman Went to War* (1933), enlisted in the National Guard and had attained the rank of captain by 1907. On 1 February 1915, though still a citizen of the USA, McBride was commissioned into the Canadian 43rd Infantry Regiment and attached to 21st Battalion CEF as a musketry instructor. However, his military service was characterised by drunkenness and insubordination. Private McBride, as he became after his commission had been rescinded, reached France in September 1915. After commanding machine-gunners, he demonstrated an aptitude as a sniper. Granted a temporary commission

on 31 May 1916, and awarded the Military Medal in June, McBride was subsequently 'Dismissed from the Service by sentence of a General Court-Martial'. He then joined the US Army to serve as a marksmanship and sniping instructor, only to resign – once again in disgrace – in October 1918. However, as *A Rifleman Went to War* eloquently testifies, McBride was a fastidious observer and was highly regarded as a mentor by fellow sniper instructors.

Nikolay Dimitrievich Nadolko was born in the Bashkir republic in 1926, though his family were Ukrainian. An aptitude for marksmanship, learned on a collective farm, enabled him to attend a sniper school in Kazakhstan. Graduating in August 1944, Nadolko went to serve in the Ukraine with the 585th Rifle Regiment, obtaining about 15 kills before being sent, shortly before the war ended, to study in Odessa.

Aleksandra Petrovna Medvedeva (Nazarkina), listed by Alla Begunova in *Angels of Death*, served with the 508th Rifle Regiment, 174th Rifle Division. Her final tally was at least 43 kills.

Evgeniy Adrianovich Nikolaev ⁎ (1920–2002), author of *Red Army Sniper* (2017) and also, with his granddaughter Dina Nikolaeva, of *Sovetskie Snayperu v Boyo 1941–1945*, a fascinating history of Soviet sniping based on newspaper articles and interviews with fellow snipers. Born in Tambov, Nikolaev worked as a theatre-set designer before being drafted in October 1940. He subsequently served with NKVD infantry units in Karelia and then at Leningrad, where he was among the first snipers to be deployed. After being seriously wounded, Nikolaev was eventually transferred to the counter-intelligence service, SMERSH; his count had reached 324 kills.

Anatoly Navara was born in 1927 near Kharkhov in eastern Ukraine. His father was a leading Communist Party official, and so Anatoly duly joined the army in 1944 to be sent for sniper training at Piryatin. Sent to serve with on the 2nd Ukranian Front in February 1944, before graduating from sniper school, Navara served for some months before returning to training, which remained incomplete when the war ended.

Klavdiya Panteleyeva (Kalugina), serving with the 344th Rifle Division of 33rd Army, registered 'at least 3' kills but is best remembered for illuminating reminiscences dictated in 2009 to Artem Drabkin and recounted in Ulanov's *Stalkers of the Enemy*.

Lyudmila Mikhaylovna Pavlichenko ⁕ (1916–74), author of *Lady Death* (2018), was born Lyudmila Belova in Bila Tsverka in the Ukraine. Embarking on a five-year history course at Kiev University in 1937, Pavlichenko joined an Osoaviakhim shooting club in her teens and won many trophies. Volunteering in the summer of 1941, she was assigned to the 54th Rifle Regiment, fighting initially to defend Odessa before moving on to Sevastopol. Her first 100 kills were achieved with an Obr. 91/30 Mosin-Nagant, and though presented with a Tokarev SNT-40 at the time, she continued to use the Mosin-Nagant whenever possible. Credited with 257 kills by May 1942, Pavlichenko was then injured by a mortar-bomb fragment and withdrawn from combat to be sent with Vladimir Pchelintsev on a tour to North America and then Britain to raise awareness of the desperate struggle on the Eastern Front. When she returned to the USSR, Pavlichenko was made Hero of the Soviet Union, became a sniper instructor, and ended the war ranked as a major. She contributed a brief account of her career to a Soviet historical publication shortly before her death, and her memoirs appeared posthumously.

Vladimir Nikolaevich Pchelintsev ⁕ (1919–2001) accompanied Lyudmila Pavlichenko on a tour of North America and Britain in 1942–3. He was not only among the best of the Soviet rifle shots but also an influential sniper trainer. Born in Tambov, Pchelintsev joined the army to serve on the Leningrad Front. Politically active with Komsomol, Pchelintsev was created a Hero of the Soviet Union in February 1942. His personal tally amounted to 456 – including 14 snipers – but his front-line service was terminated in favour of an educational role in 1944.

Eric Hillman Penberthy ⁕ (1889–1942), author of 'British Snipers (i). An Account of the Training and Organisation of Snipers in the British Armies in France' published in September 1920 in *The English Review*, was born in New South Wales and was among those attending the Conference of Experts in Scouting, Sniping and Observation held in July 1917. Penberthy represented the British Third Army. The 1918 *Army List* records him as a lieutenant in the 'London Regiment (London Rifle Brigade)', but he subsequently transferred to the Royal Flying Corps before emigrating to South Africa.

Iosif Iosifovich Pilyushin ⁕ (1903–?), subject of *Red Sniper on the Eastern Front* (2010), served the 14th and 105th Rifle Regiments of the 21st NKVD Rifle Division. Credited with about a hundred kills, though other sources give 115 or 136, Pilyushin lost an eye to a shell fragment in 1942, but re-taught himself

to shoot left-handed well enough to resume his sniping career before being badly wounded and hospitalised.

Mariya Semyonovna Polivanova (1922–42), partner of Natalya Kovshova, killed on the same day, joined the army in October 1941 to serve with the Moscow Communist Rifle Division and then on the North-West Front with the 528th Rifle Regiment, 1st Shock Army. Polivanova is usually credited with only 50 kills when her total was probably higher; most sources agree on about 75. She was made Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously in 1943.

Hesketh Vernon 'Hex' Prichard ⁎ (1876–1922), son of Lieutenant Hesketh Brodrick Prichard, who had died before Hex was born. Returning to England, Hex and his mother began to write highly successful adventure fiction which allowed him to embark on a career as an adventurer-explorer. When the First World War began, Hesketh Hesketh-Prichard (as he had become known) was rejected for front-line service owing to his age, but found a niche working for the Intelligence Office. After using his telescope-sighted hunting rifle 'to help the war effort by killing some Germans', Hesketh-Prichard then attempted to impress upon senior officers that counter-sniping was practicable and find backing for his sniper-training campaign. Returning to France, he collaborated with fellow pioneer Langford Lloyd at the 'telescopic-sight school' attached to X Corps, and then went to Third Army. An excellent teacher, and a passionate advocate of the telescope sight, Hesketh-Prichard created the First Army School of Scouting, Observation and Sniping at Linghem in the summer of 1916. The school grew rapidly, employing Canadians among its staff, and attained 'provisional establishment' status in November. Innovations promoted by Hesketh-Prichard and his colleagues included use of dummy heads as sniper-locators and a way of inserting an undetectable steel-lined loophole in a sandbag wall.

Aleksandr Romanenko, born near Volgograd, won many shooting competitions in his youth – skills that earned him a place on a sniper-training course which lasted until October 1943. He was sent to the Dnepr bridgehead as part of an eight-man sniper group, was subsequently hospitalised in Kiev after being wounded, but recovered to traverse the Reich as far as Berlin when the war ended. Claiming 29 kills, though this has not been confirmed, Romanenko served the army until 1950.

Clifford Shore ⁎ (1907–56), author of *With British Snipers to the Reich* (1948), an enthusiastic marksman with no combat experience, served initially with

the RAF Regiment before transferring to the army. The 1948 *Army List* notes him as captain in the Manchester Regiment (Territorial Army), but gives no other details. Shore's book is highly detailed, but often opinionated.

Roza Egorovna Shanina ⁕ (1924–45), a prolific diarist, remains one of the best-known of all Russian female snipers. Her life and career are summarised in Appendix 2.

Frederick James Sleath (1889–1966), born in Borrowstounness (Bo'ness), West Lothian, graduated from Edinburgh University with a master's degree shortly before the First World War began. Commissioned in the Royal Scots, rising to the rank of lieutenant by the war's end, he then followed a career in journalism, and *Sniper Jackson*, basically a personal reminiscence in the form of a novel, was published in 1919 to be followed by five thrillers. Sleath was recorded in the 1939 Register as Journalist and Editor/Manager of the 'C. Journal'.

Bruno Sutkus ⁕ (1924–2003), the subject of *Sniper Ace: From the Eastern Front to Siberia* (2009), was born in the Tannenwalde district of Ostpreussen. Transferring from the Hitlerjugend to the Sturm-Abteilung in May 1942, he moved in July 1943 to Füsilier-Ersatz-Bataillon 22 and then to the sniper school in Vilnius. Graduating at the end of December 1943, Sutkus joined Grenadier-Regiment 196 and obtained his first kill on 8 May 1944; the 50th followed on 4 September; the 100th on 16 November; and the 150th on 17 December. Reaching 200 kills on 7 January 1945, promotion to *Obergrefreiter* presaged a transfer to sniper school as an instructor. Hospitalised on 22 January after being wounded, Sutkus was captured by the Red Army in May 1945. His status as a sniper unrecognised, he survived interrogation, torture and banishment to Siberia. Bruno Sutkus re-entered Germany in 1991 and was allowed to settle there in January 1997. Remarkably, his highly detailed sniper log survives.

Richard William Tregaskis (1916–73), author of *Guadalcanal Diary*, was employed by the *Boston American Record* when the USA entered the Second World War at the end of 1941. One of only two newspapermen present on the island, his memoir, published in 1943, has been reprinted many times.

George Owen Van Orden (1906–87), son of an officer in the US Marine Corps, enlisted in the Marines in 1925 as a private and retired in 1949 ranked as brigadier-general. A well-known competition shot, winning many prizes, Van Orden was renowned for spearheading the Marine Corps Scout-Sniper School

training course during the Second World War and compiling *Equipping the American Sniper* with Gunner Calvin Lloyd, while his reminiscences were also used by Martin Pegler in *Out of Nowhere*. Van Orden was also a vocal proponent of the Winchester Model 70 rifle fitted with large-magnification Unertl optical sights as an ideal sniper's weapon.

Hermann Wirnsberger achieved 64 kills while serving with 3. Gebirgs-Jager-Division from 1 September 1944 until seriously wounded. Thereafter, he trained snipers until apparently returning to combat duty shortly before the war ended in May 1945. Little else is known of his career, however.

Vasiliy Grigorevich Zaytsev ⁎ (1915–91), author of *Notes of a Russian Sniper* (2014), was born in the Ural mountains. When the Great Patriotic War began, Zaytsev, then a petty-officer clerk in the navy, stationed in Vladivostok, volunteered to serve in the front line. Transferring to the army as a senior warrant officer, and after proving his marksmanship, Zaytsev was posted to the 1047th Rifle Regiment, part of 62nd Army defending Stalingrad. Zaytsev's memoirs give a graphic impression of the war among the ruined factories and wrecked industrial installations in which attackers and defenders were often, literally, a wall's width apart. Zaytsev was particularly adept at making use of cover and became a leading advocate of changing position after each shot. While taking part in an assault on German lines in 1943, shortly after being made a Hero of the Soviet Union, he was temporarily blinded by a mortar-bomb blast but eventually returned to combat before the war ended.

Yuliya Konstantinovna Zhukova ⁎, author of *Girl with a Sniper Rifle* (2019), was born in Uralsk in 1926. Volunteering for sniper training early in 1944, struggling successfully through eight months of training, she subsequently served on the Belorussian Front with the 611th Rifle Regiment of 88th Rifle Division. Now usually credited with at least eight kills, Yuliya Zhukova is better known for her eminently readable memoir originally published as *Devushka so Snayperskoy Vintovkoy* (2006).

RISE OF THE SNIPER

The official views of sniping, often hostile, have altered as the years have rolled past. It is probably fair to record that, the USSR/Russia excepted, the sniper has never enjoyed public esteem in a way accorded to men whose heroism was lionised.

When the First World War began, heedless of lessons learned in conflicts from the American Civil War to South Africa, the establishment view was often simply that a good target shot would make an ideal sniper (if no alternative to 'unsporting' sniping was to be found!) or that men from army marksmanship schools would simply achieve success on the front line. But this approach had its flaws, as Hesketh-Prichard explained in *Sniping in France*:

> In the [British] Army there has always been in certain quarters a prejudice against very accurate shooting, a prejudice which is quite understandable when one considers the aims and ends of musketry. While sniping is the opportunism of the rifle, musketry is its routine. It would obviously never do to diminish the depth of your beaten zone by excess of accuracy. But this war, which, whatever may be said to the contrary – and much was said to the contrary – was largely a war of specialists, changed many things, and among them the accurate shot or sniper was destined to prove his extraordinary value.

By the spring of 1915, the notion that sniping had no value was being steadily discredited. Yet, in the absence of army-wide direction (which was to happen, grudgingly, in 1917), the British achieved only individual laurels – usually gained by junior officers acting on their own initiative. The Germans still saw sniping as a 'temporary job' for qualified marksmen to whom optically sighted rifles were issued by an NCO.

The lack of an effective riposte to the German snipers was to cost the British dearly. On 5 February 1915, Lieutenant Stanley Shingleton of the Royal Field Artillery confided in his diary that he had been:

> sent in charge of a working party at night time to build dummy redoubts behind the front line, we crept along, taking advantage of the hedges etc. There were not many hours during the period between nightfall and moonrise so we had to get to work sharp for to be seen standing in the open meant instant death from a sniper's bullet. It was even dangerous to wear a luminous wrist watch for the light from the same could be seen a long way off in the pitch darkness; a few snipers' bullets whistled past us, and the R.E. officer in charge suggested that my luminous watch was the cause, whereupon I put it in my pocket!

An early and largely misplaced belief in the value of established target-shooters soon gave way to the notion that training could only be effective if snipers were drawn from those who were practised at stalking, hunting or wing-shooting.

Target-shots such as Lieutenant George Gray of the Scottish Rifles, winner of the King's Prize at Bisley in 1908 and the Caledonian Challenge Shield in 1913, often proved to be superb instructors. But Clifford Shore, writing in *With British Snipers to the Reich*, who had a poor opinion of the military value of target-shooters, observed that:

> During the training of snipers there were many instances of men being excellent target shots but failing in the role of sniper shots. When I mentioned this matter … with an officer, a very well-known Bisley shot and a sniping instructor in England and Italy during the [Second World] war, I was taken to task and my opinions rebuked in similar sentences to the following:– 'In my experience, the lad who has shot at school, or at Bisley has been streets ahead of anyone else, because he's a better shot'. Frankly, I should have thought that anyone who had sniped and worked as a sniper trainer would have found instances qualifying my contention that many range and competition shots did not make the grade … This was a point mentioned to us at the sniping school in Holland [that] some men who were very good target shots … found that shooting under service conditions was a very different proposition.
>
> Psychologically, the difference between resting on a placid firing point and shooting in war, even if one is in a comparatively safe position oneself, is the greatest possible contrast.

And Eric Penberthy recalled in *The English Review* in 1920 how:

> In the early days of the war, when reports of German 'sniping' began to be published, it was commonly considered a 'dirty' method of fighting and as not 'playing the game'.
>
> Sniping in some form or other has usually developed in every great war since the invention of firearms. Austrian sharpshooters were used against the soldiers of Frederick the Great, and were so effective that at times the ex-Kaiser's ancestor found it difficult to bring his Hussars, armed only with short sabres, out of their camps.
>
> This led to the formation in the Prussian Army of Jager battalions, recruited from hunting districts, because professional hunters had not only the necessary skill in marksmanship but also the courage, good eyesight, powers of observation, knowledge of stalking, and the use of cover which the successful sniper must possess.
>
> That is why at the beginning of the war the enemy was well equipped with expert snipers.

However, Penberthy said, the British had no one with special training until steps 'were taken in France to train and organise our snipers':

> In 1914 the circumstantial reports of the deadly work done by the Boche snipers gave the world the impression that German soldiers were better shots than we were. The German never was a better shot, or even as good a shot, as the Britisher.
>
> It was the better shooting and the superior manipulation of their rifles by the 'Old Contemptibles' that enabled the British Army to 'walk backwards' from Mons in perfect order and discipline until the enemy was effectively checked. But the shooting done by Lord French's old Army was not sniping, it was controlled fire. It was done by sections and platoons at the word of command. Targets and ranges were indicated and fire-orders given. And the result was such a torrent of well aimed and well directed bullets against masses of the enemy that captured German officers stated their belief that every British Tommy was armed with a light machine gun. But we had no snipers, men specially selected and trained to find small and indistinct targets, to shoot at them on their own individual initiative and be sure to kill at the first shot.

He then observed that 'when both sides settled down to trench warfare':

> the Boche sniper showed the value of his special training. Often behind his trench line as well as in it, and from cunningly constructed

and concealed posts, he kept a vigilant watch on our lines. He picked off sentries and observers, who carelessly or sometimes unavoidably exposed themselves.

Many officers were picked off when carrying out the dangerous but essential duty of making a daylight reconnaissance until at last the Boche sniper dominated our trenches and No Man's Land so effectively that it became urgently necessary to take steps to deal with him.

At first this form of warfare appealed most strongly to those battalions which possessed keen hunters amongst officers and men. That is why snipers were first organised most effectively in the Canadian and Highland regiments.

So the system went on in our ranks of selecting men whose pre-war occupation, or recreation, specially qualified them to be snipers. It spread from one battalion to another. If the Commanding Officer was keen on sniping, or if the sector was much bothered by enemy snipers, a dozen men might be detached for this duty. Other battalions were content with one or two.

However, despite the efforts being made, activities of German snipers were:

only slightly diminished in numbers and not suppressed. A revision of methods and further organisation became necessary, and some experienced officers were selected to study the problem and make suggestions. One of the first things noted was that a large number of men had been selected as snipers who were totally unfitted for the work. In order to carry out his duties, the sniper was allowed a great deal of freedom. He could wander about the trenches, selecting suitable posts from which to observe and shoot, and he was naturally excused a great many irksome tasks which the ordinary soldier had to do as a matter of routine.

A sniper, therefore, came to be regarded by observant but not too energetic soldiers as a man with a soft job, and there were naturally many seekers after these posts. In the trenches, the opportunities of testing a man's ability for this special work, especially in marksmanship, were very limited, and many soldiers were given the appointment who had no idea of the job.

One obvious shortcoming was the lack of appropriate training:

The first thing they had to learn was how to find their targets. It was quite a common thing in so-called 'quiet' sectors for men to be in

> the trenches for six months without seeing a Hun, and the difficulty of finding a casual head or a loop-hole can be imagined. To train these men, some keen young officer was selected in each battalion. Sometimes he was detached from his company and did nothing else, although it was a very long time before he was given the status of an officer doing special duties and allowed for on the establishment.

The key to success often lay simply in finding a 'sniping officer' who combined shooting experience with the ability to select the right kind of man and then undertake training both in the trenches and out of the line:

> As time went on it was realised that if a sniper was doing his duty properly by keeping his front under continual observation and being ready to fire on enemy snipers or observers, or anyone else who exposed himself, he must also see a host of other happenings. Although these were not directly bearing on his work as a sniper, they would, if reported to the proper quarter, provide valuable and continuous information about the enemy.
>
> Consequently, snipers were now trained to write detailed reports on what they had observed during their tour of duty. These details were recorded in a report by the Sniping Officer, who now became more generally known as the Battalion 'Intelligence' Officer.
>
> By this system of reports snipers were able to provide information about such extremely important matters as the identification of the enemy on any front, the time and method of reliefs, the presence of mining operations, and so on. Trench warfare may be said to have brought this system of collecting Intelligence into existence, and the sniper became the machinery for carrying it out.

But the situation improved rapidly once the idea of training snipers became vital. Penberthy acknowledged the forward-looking step taken when:

> In December, 1915, a school for training snipers and Intelligence officers was started near Ypres by the Second Army, with such excellent results that similar schools were soon established for all the other Armies in France.
>
> As there was no previous model on which these schools could be framed, their methods of training had to be based upon actual experience in the field and continually modified to suit new conditions. At first the shooting was considered the main thing, but later, when

> the importance of observation was realized, they became schools of 'Scouting, Observation and Sniping'.

And Frederick Crum mused in *Memoirs of a Rifleman Scout* on his last tour of duty in the Ypres Salient in February 1916:

> After six days' rest we returned to the [Lancashire Farm] trench; we found things more lively than usual, and it seemed probable that the Hun had some scheme up his sleeve. Shelling, shelling, shelling, and machine-gunning all day and night, but mostly away from our immediate sphere of usefulness.
>
> For the O.C. ['Officer Commanding'] it is watch and watch, and keep on watching and wondering what is at the back of anything unusual. For the time he is screwed up, as it were, ready to do the right thing if it may be, and able to keep cheery and confident. He must be up and about, visiting sentries and snipers and bombers and working and wiring parties, and watching through the telescope from Observation Posts, an eye on the weather-cock for gas winds.
>
> It was a great satisfaction to see the victory of our snipers. When we came away not a shot was ever fired by the Bosche sniper, and he had closed and sandbagged all his loopholes.
>
> Six weeks ago, when we took over the trenches, the Brigadier [Lord Binning] warned us that [German] sniping was bad, and so it was.

In May 1916, Frederick Crum was sent by General Skinner to create a Brigade School of Sniping at Acq. He subsequently recalled in *Memoirs of a Rifleman Scout* that the school had been a great success:

> We were full of ideas, all of us, Hicks, Harman, Sherry, Cox, Taylor and others. The scandal of hundreds of men getting bowled over, simply from want of teaching and imagination, stirred us to great efforts so that in addition to building a range in a chalk quarry close by, and greatly improving our marksmanship, we were able to give demonstrations, to troops resting out of the line.
>
> The methods of teaching are best understood from reading the small book which I wrote called *Scouts and Snipers in Trench Warfare*.

In a subsequent, somewhat critical, 'Report on Scouts and Snipers', Frederick Crum related how the situation on the Western Front remained problematical even as late as May 1917:

> We completed another … course and I had sent in the following Report, which led to my being appointed as Scouting and Sniping Expert at G.H.Q. in France.
>
> PRESENT POSITION. While we constantly miss chances of inflicting losses in men and morale on the enemy, we ourselves constantly incur avoidable losses. We have no recognised system, or organisation, or training, and no one at the head to secure co-operation. The Schools at Home and in France are not in touch and vary. Men trained as Scouts are often not used as Scouts, chiefly because many Officers are ignorant of their uses and value, and may even be prejudiced against Scouts.
>
> CO-OPERATION. Thus there is no co-operation between Scouts of neighbouring Battalions, or of Battalions relieving each other in the Line; nor do Scouts work as they should in touch with sentries, or with Trench-mortar, Artillery, and Intelligence Officers …
>
> WASTE. There is considerable waste of valuable material, such as telescopic-rifles, periscopes, sniperscopes, dark-glasses, etc., issued often to men untrained in their uses; at the same time it is often difficult to obtain these articles, both for training and for use at the front.
>
> LITERATURE. No official guide is yet available. Divisional Generals, Brigadiers, and keen young Officers are constantly enquiring for guidance. I forward herewith a printed booklet which has been commended by G.H.Q. France, and I could be glad if anything helpful in it could be made available. Some such system and training with model German and British trenches; with teaching by acting, training in the use of telescopic rifles, dark-glasses, jiu-jitsu, camouflage, etc., would give valuable results.
>
> SUGGESTIONS. At present we are like some valuable war-ship without chart, course, compass, rudder or Captain. I suggest that some suitable Officer should be appointed, with Staff and authority, to deal with the matter. That he should hold a Conference of Officers in charge of Schools, and that they should submit some sound scheme an Official handbook to follow.

Crum also stated that, from May to November 1917, the work with which he had been entrusted in France:

> was to carry out the 'co-ordination' for which I had always been agitating. There were (at the time) five schools of Sniping, one in each

> of the five armies; each of these Schools was working on its own lines, some devoting special attention to the scientific side of shooting and telescopic rifles, some making a speciality of observation, and some of camouflage. The wish of the Training Authorities was to introduce more night patrol work and open warfare scouting and sniping.
>
> The days of trench warfare seemed numbered and it was not considered advisable to keep a special staff merely for training in scientific marksmanship. The tendency at that time was to do away with the specialist and make men all-round handymen. How far it was possible to turn out men efficient both in sniping and scouting, were questions on which experts did not agree, any more than they did when it was laid down that an Infantry soldier must be efficient in bombing and Lewis Gun as well as with bayonet, rifle, and the rifle grenade!

However, there were still many problems to be overcome:

> The 'powers that be' at G.H.Q. at the time were not in favour of sniping at all as a separate art; they were set on further training in Scouting, in which we had been found sadly deficient in those glimpses of open warfare afforded on the Somme, at Wytschaete Hill and further North. Thus at the outset one had to find out what was possible, and then how best to secure the soundest compromise in training.
>
> One difficulty was that the authority of the Training Staff at G.H.Q., being newly established, old established Army Schools and Corps and other schools of all kinds often thought they knew better than G.H.Q. Possibly they did, sometimes, anyway. The process of co-ordination of all Education and Training was then at an early stage.

Crum had spent two months visiting army schools, corps and divisional headquarters, with occasional visits to brigades and battalions along the front:

> In this way one came into touch with the views of all kinds and conditions of men. The next step was to hold a Conference of Experts in Scouting, Sniping and Observation at Boulogne, where the various views were discussed.
>
> Thirdly, at Bouchon, after training a dozen young soldiers with the help of expert officers and N.C.O.'s, I was able to work out and demonstrate to representatives of each Army H.Q. and Sniping School a suitable system of intensive training in Scouting.