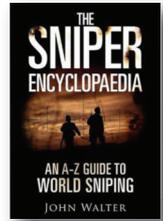


The sniper encyclopaedia: an A-Z guide to world sniping

by John Walter

Greenhill Books: Barnsley, South Yorkshire; 2019; 306 pp., ISBN 9781784382407; RRP \$39.99;
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Sniping can be regarded as the epitome of one branch of the infantryman's art – his skill at employing his rifle to specifically target an opponent, particularly a key person such as an officer or radio operator. At various times, as at the beginning of the Great War, doing so was regarded as unacceptable, but this usually changed as wars progressed and casualties mounted. Today's sniper has a high public profile: no longer the pariah; more the hero.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'sniping' was derived in the early 19th century from the notion of 'shooting at men as one would a game-bird' and the 'sniper' was 'one who snipes, or shoots from concealment'. Men and women skilled in sniping have been variously known as snipers, sharpshooters and/or marksmen.

This encyclopaedia of sniping addresses each of the main components of the sniping art: the sniper; sniper rifles; sniper ammunition; and sniping aids, such as telescopic sights and rangefinders. It contains personal details of hundreds of snipers, both men and women, drawn from many nations; and the history and development of the many specialist sniper rifles, specialist ammunition, aids and accessories, including optical sights and laser rangefinders. It also describes specific campaigns and places where marksmen have influenced the course of individual battles.

The author, John Walter, is an expert on small arms and has published more than 70 books on rifles, handguns and gunmakers. His most recent book, *Snipers at war: an equipment and operations history* (Greenhill: Barnsley, S. Yorkshire; 2017), is a history and analysis, from the Crimean War to the present, of the equipment, tactics and personalities of the 'sniping world'. This encyclopaedia is a companion to *Snipers at War* and

provides detail on personalities and equipment that could not be included in the more broad-brush history.

As an encyclopaedia, subjects are listed alphabetically, not chronologically or by topic. Hence, the book needs to be used as a reference book when one seeks detailed information on a specific topic. No encyclopaedia can be comprehensive, but the author has chosen well in deciding what to include and what to omit. Coverage of issues is comprehensive and is generally indicative of individual personalities, weapons and equipment that did not make it into the volume.

I was fascinated by some of the biographies, especially those of Russian women snipers and their almost unbelievable achievements on the Eastern Front in World War II. There also are feature articles on specific subjects – rifles and accessories; special topics; personalities; and units and insignia – spread through the volume and helpfully colour-coded by category.

There is no index, but there are ready-reference lists, one on each of 10 specific topics, such as anti-matériel rifles, female snipers, male snipers, sniper rifles and snipers in a specific war. While these assist readers find less well-known entries in the encyclopaedia, I did not find them nearly as convenient as a conventional index.

In some parts of the volume (e.g. pp. 252-255), there are also horizontal arrows scattered through the text. They are usually associated with proper names and appear to be typesetters' annotations which were not intended to appear in the final document. I found them quite off-putting at times.

These deficiencies notwithstanding, this is a very well researched encyclopaedia and I recommend it to anyone interested in the art of sniping.

David Leece