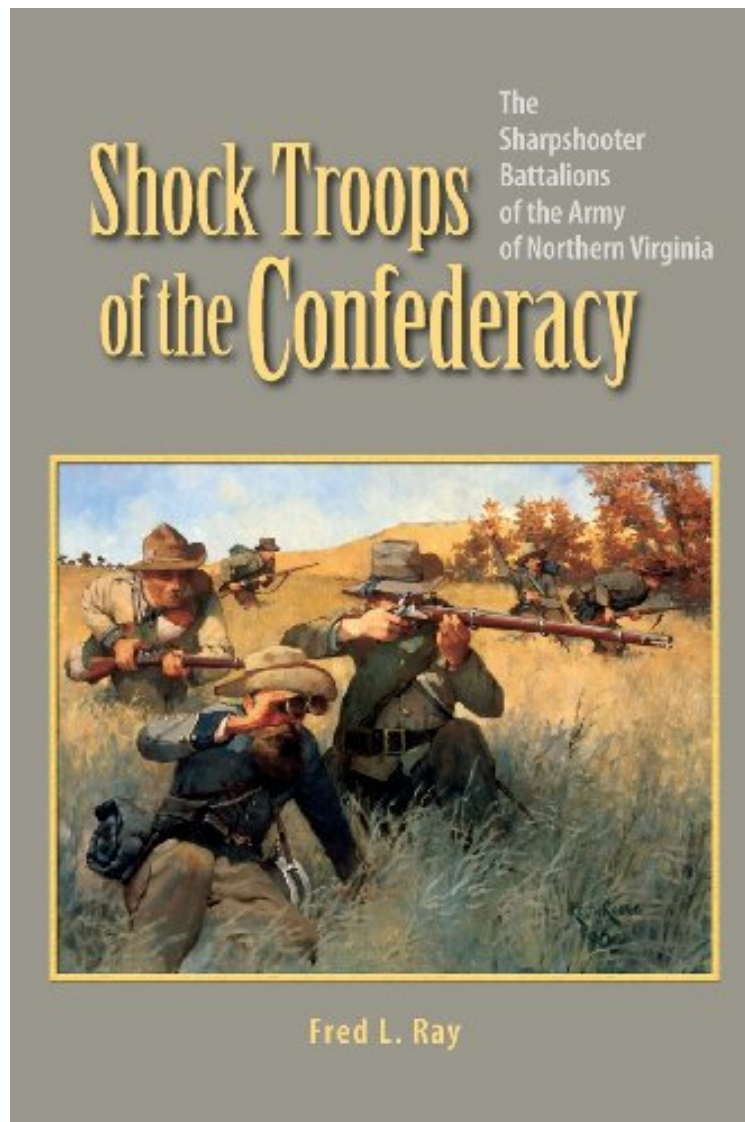


(Online library) Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia

Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia

Fred L. Ray

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Fred L. Ray : Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shock Troops of the Confederacy: The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia:

28 of 28 people found the following review helpful. The Advent of Moden WarfareBy Miles KrismanI recently had

the pleasure of reading Fred L. Ray's new book, "Shock Troops of the Confederacy - The Sharpshooter Battalions of the Army of Northern Virginia". It offered a great deal of new information whereby the author outlines the changes that took place within the Confederate army that led to a new style of warfare, a warfare in which the intelligence, skill, and courage of the individual soldier became paramount. In a book that takes the reader on a journey of discovery, out between the battle lines, Fred successfully illustrates the factors that brought about these developments. Largely forgotten in the annals of time, the story of the Sharpshooters of the Confederacy begins with two Virginians, Robert Rodes and Eugene Blackford. Both men were from Lynchburg, Virginia, but through a quirk of fate, both entered Confederate service as members of the 5th Alabama Infantry Regiment. During the winter of 1862, Rodes and Blackford formulated a new military unit to serve the Confederacy that would change the course of the war and in doing so, change warfare itself. Invaluable lessons were learned by both men at the Battle of Boonsboro, also known as the Battle of South Mountain, where Rodes' Brigade successfully fought a delaying action against an entire Division of the Union army, thereby allowing General Lee to consolidate his army and fight the Battle of Sharpsburg, or Antietam, three days later. These Confederate troops on South Mountain, primarily dispersed as a line of skirmishers, held off the advance of the Army of the Potomac by fighting from behind the rocky outcrops and the heavily wooded slopes as they slowly fell back. This single Brigade accomplished their objective and arguably saved the Army of Northern Virginia, however, they were mauled badly by the superior skirmish tactics of the Union forces. This became the impetus for change. Over the next few months, with the support of Robert E. Lee, General Rodes successfully organized and trained a Sharpshooter Battalion within his Brigade that would serve as a model for other units in the Confederacy. Fred Ray documents the accomplishments of the sharpshooting units of the Confederacy from their baptism under fire at the Battle of Chancellorsville, to the final days in the trenches of Petersburg and eventual surrender. The successes of the Sharpshooter Battalion during the "Overland Campaign" in early 1864, convinced General Lee to mandate that all Infantry Brigades would be required to form Sharpshooter units of their own. These men received special training that included long ranged target practice and soon were recognized as the elite troops of each Brigade. As the war dragged on, it was the Sharpshooter Battalions that became the primary fighting force of the Confederacy, especially in the Shenandoah Valley and around Petersburg. In fact, they were the ones that led the last attack of the war for the Army of Northern Virginia at Fort Steadman, on March 25, 1865. This is not just a cursory description of the various field actions, but rather an in depth study that takes the reader onto the battlefield where we hear the banter between the lines, rush forward in a hotly contested skirmish, and learn what it meant to serve on the front lines during the last years of the war. This understudied aspect of the war is deftly handled by the author and the reader comes away with a comprehension of how an undermanned, half starved, ragged band of men adapted to their new reality, modifying tactics, innovating and ultimately developing methods that would serve as a model for warfare into the following century. Insightful, detailed, and exciting are words that best describe "Shock Troops of the Confederacy". For those that are looking for a better understanding of the transition from Napoleonic tactics to the smaller, task orientated, combat units of the 20th century, this is a "must read". Well researched and referenced, this scholarly work is quite readable and should be added to the library of all Civil War enthusiasts. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A good read. By R. Davis The Confederate (Rodes and Blackford) sharpshooters (light infantry) were every bit as proficient as the Union's (1st and 2nd U.S.S./Berdan's) sharpshooters. Shock Troops of the Confederacy is interesting, informative and concise. A good read. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good read! By B.W.C. Good read, lots of detail!

The term sharpshooter had a more general meaning in the mid-19th Century than it does today. Then it could mean either a roving precision shooter like the modern sniper (a term that did not come into use until late in the century) or a light infantryman who specialized in the petite guerre: scouting, picketing, and skirmishing. The modern sharpshooter (the term comes from the German scharfschutzen, not the use of Sharps rifles) appeared in Central Europe around 1700. At the beginning of the Civil War, thanks to Hiram Berdan, the Army of the Potomac had a definite advantage in sharpshooting and light infantry, and this came as a rude shock to the Confederates during the 1862 Peninsular campaign. In response the Confederates organized their own sharpshooters, beginning with those of an obscure Alabama colonel, Bristor Gayle. Confederate general Robert Rodes organized the first battalion of sharpshooters in his brigade in early 1863, and later in each brigade of his division. In early 1864 General Lee adopted the concept for the entire Army of Northern Virginia, mandating that each infantry brigade field a sharpshooter battalion. These units found ready employment in the Overland campaign, and later in the trenches of Petersburg and in the fast-moving Shenandoah campaign of 1864. Although little has been written about them (the last book, written by a former sharpshooter, appeared in 1899), they played an important and sometimes pivotal role in many battles and campaigns in 1864 and 1865. By the end of the war the sharpshooters were experimenting with tactics that would become standard practice fifty years later. Although most people think of Berdan's Sharpshooters when the subject comes up, the Confederate sharpshooter battalions had a far greater effect on the outcome of the conflict. Later in the war, in response to the Confederate dominance of the skirmish line, the Federals began to organize their own sharpshooter units at division level, though they never adopted an army-wide system. Making extensive use of unpublished source

material, author Fred Ray has written *Shock Troops of the Confederacy*, which tells the complete story of the development of the Army of Northern Virginia's sharpshooter battalions, the weapons they used, how they trained with them, and their tactical use on the battlefield. It also tells the human story of the sharpshooters themselves, who describe in their own words what it was like to be in the thick of battle, on the skirmish line, and at their lonely picket posts.

Given the enthusiasm with which academic presses in the United States publish serious writings on the American Civil War, and the mountains of second-rate works on the subject produced for sale to tourists, school children, and other innocents, it is hard to condemn a reader for being wary of a self-published book on the subject. In the case of *Shock Troops of the Confederacy*, however, such skepticism will soon give way to considerable admiration, for in creating this skillfully researched, highly literate, and extraordinarily accessible volume, a self-taught historian has displayed a number of virtues that many professionals would do well to imitate. While reviews on academic journals rarely touch upon such issues, *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* is such a beautiful volume that some discussion of the book designer's art is unavoidable. The illustrations are both attractive and appropriate, the layout of the chapters is pleasing, and the type-face is kind to the eyes. Best of all, *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* is well supplied with handsome sketch maps. These, which were especially drawn for the book, provide the reader with all of the information needed to follow the course of the campaign, battle, or engagement in question, but nothing that is superfluous or distracting. The same sort of thoughtfulness that is so much in evidence in the presentation of *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* can also be seen in the structure of the text. The book as a whole tells several stories, each of which relates to the others in a manner reminiscent of Russian stacking dolls. The tale at the heart of the book, the analog of the smallest matryoshka, is the saga of a particular group of sharpshooters who served the cause of Southern independence. This regimental history is insinuated into a concise (and extraordinarily fresh) account of the operations of the Army of Northern Virginia, beginning with the Peninsula Campaign of the spring of 1862 and ending three years later with the Confederate withdrawal from the doomed fortress of Petersburg. This unique exercise in operational history, in turn, is nested in an overview of the organization and achievements of all of the sharpshooters, whether Union and Confederate, who fought in the American Civil War. Finally, the material that is specific to the War Between the States is embedded in an authoritative discussion of the broader revolution in shoulder arms and infantry tactics that took place in the middle years of the nineteenth century. The story at the core of *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* makes extensive use of the unpublished (and hitherto unexploited) memoirs of Major Eugene Blackford. A witness of a sort that historians rarely encounter, Blackford combined a thorough understanding of military affairs with a novelist's eye for detail and a knack for being at the right place at the right time. His memoir thus permits the painting of a highly nuanced picture of the sharpshooter battalions he commanded, the tactics they employed, and the effect that such employment had upon the course of battles and campaigns. In addition to this, material from the memoirs makes possible encounters with Blackford himself, a study-in-contrasts who challenges many of our long-standing stereotypes about Confederate officers. Neither lowland planter nor upcountry yeoman, Blackford was a third-generation abolitionist who, at the start of the war, decided that the defense of his home state of Virginia was of greater importance than the freeing of slaves. --Bruce I. Gudmundsson, Marine Corps University

This is a skillfully researched and written story of men, their weapons, and their contributions to the war effort of the Confederacy. It is not a common story, however, and it is one that has never been told before. Any student of the Civil War has heard of Berdan's Sharpshooters in the Union army, but few have heard of an Alabama colonel named Bristol Gayle. Few know about the battalions of sharpshooters formed in 1863 or of Robert E. Lee's embracing the concept of incorporating a sharpshooter battalion in each infantry brigade in the Army of Northern Virginia. These were elite troops, specially trained in marksmanship, and their use in the war affected tactics and the results of battles. Understand, as Fred Ray teaches us: these sharpshooters functioned as snipers, but in fact they were light infantry especially trained as pickets, scouts, advance guards, and skirmishers. The story begins with the 18th century story of riflemen and an analysis of military tactics. It progresses through the description of technological advances in the development of rifled weapons. And, it takes us through the trials and tribulations of gaining acceptance of the use of trained units of sharpshooters in the Confederate army. They were at Seven Pines, Gaines' Mill, South Mountain, and they trained through the winter at Fredericksburg. They fought at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. For these and the campaigns and battles that followed, Fred Ray takes you through each with detail and effective analysis. In many battles, even as the Confederate resources declined, these sharpshooters dominated skirmish lines. Their story is truly a remarkable one and they have finally been given their due. --James H. Nottage, *Blue Gray* magazine Holiday 2007

Fred Ray's *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* covers a little-known but important aspect of the Civil War: the "sharpshooter battalions" of the Army of Northern Virginia. Overall, though, this book is really about adaptation and innovation on the battlefield. Although Ray uses a multitude of credible sources, including many firsthand accounts from sharpshooters on both sides, his best source is a diary kept by Major Eugene Blackford, a Confederate sharpshooter battalion commander in General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Blackford trained his unit in skirmish drills and marksmanship out to 600 yards. *** *Shock Troops of the Confederacy* contains

43 informative maps and 59 illustrations, including pictures with information of the sharpshooter's weapons and uniforms. More than just an account of the sharpshooters' exploits, the book makes a strong case that the late Civil War battles they fought in were predecessors to the nonlinear tactics of the 20th century. Ray follows the development of light infantry organization, tactics, and weapons forward to the Boer War, through World War I, and beyond. In fact, Ray's study is still relevant for our forces in the field today, as we learn again that small-unit battlefield adaptation, innovation, and precision marksmanship are just as important now as they ever were. --Scott A. Porter, Lieutenant Colonel, Ret. September-October Military From the Inside Flap Shock Troops of the Confederacy tells the story of the elite troops of the South -- on the picket line and in the thick of the battlefields of Virginia. Whether screening Stonewall Jackson's flank march at Chancellorsville or leading the last desperate assault at Fort Stedman, the sharpshooters led the Army of Northern Virginia in the attack, protected it at rest, and covered its retreat. At the beginning of the Civil War the Army of the Potomac had, thanks to Hiram Berdan, an advantage in sharpshooting and light infantry, which came as a rude shock to the Confederates during the 1862 Peninsular campaign. In response the Confederates organized their own corps of elite light infantry, the Sharpshooters. Building on the ideas of an obscure Alabama colonel, Bristor Gayle, General Robert Rodes organized the first battalion of sharpshooters in his brigade in early 1863, and later in each brigade of his division. In early 1864 General Lee adopted the concept for the entire Army of Northern Virginia, directing each infantry brigade to field a sharp-shooter battalion. These units found ready employment in the Overland campaign, and later in the trenches of Petersburg and in the fast-moving Shenandoah campaign of 1864. Although little has been written about them (the last book, written by a former sharpshooter, appeared in 1899), they played an important and sometimes pivotal role in many battles and campaigns in 1864 and 1865. By the end of the war the sharpshooters were experimenting with tactics that would become standard practice fifty years later. Although most people think of Berdan's Sharpshooters when the subject comes up, the Confederate sharpshooter battalions had a far greater effect on the outcome of the conflict. Later in the war, in response to the Confederate dominance of the skirmish line, the Federals began to organize their own sharpshooter units at division level, though they never adopted an army-wide system. The book tells the story of the development of the sharpshooter battalions, their tactical use on the battlefield, and the human story of the sharpshooters themselves.

About the Author Fred L. Ray is the president and CEO of CFS Press, Inc., and author of several books on flood and swiftwater rescue. He is a US Army veteran who spent most of his time in armored cavalry, during which he served two tours in Vietnam.