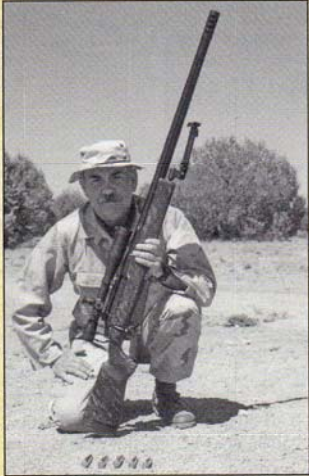


Major John L. Plaster on his new book,

The History of Sniping and Sharpshooting



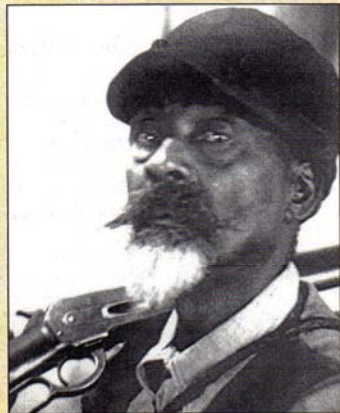
Why did you write *The History of Sniping and Sharpshooting*?

I wrote this book for the same reason that I wrote my sniper training handbook, *The Ultimate Sniper*: I wanted to produce the most thoroughly researched and most complete such volume ever written. I had a shelf full of sniping histories, but none, I thought, delved deeply enough. Very few even attempted to answer the essential question, "How?" I think readers want to understand *how* these weapons operate, their inherent advantages and disadvantages, and *how* they're employed. As well, a number of histories just gloss through entire conflicts and battles, reflecting little research or understanding. I set out to write a book of sufficient length that I could truly cover the subject.

Your book breaks new ground by incorporating numerous accounts of Native Americans, women and African Americans as snipers and sharpshooters. Was this a purposeful attempt at diversity?

The book contains a diversity of sharpshooters and snipers because there have been so many great rifle shooters forgotten in the dusty cracks of history. It gave me immense satisfaction, for example, to tell the story of Ojibwa Chief Francis Pegahmagabow, an acclaimed World War I sniper and Canada's most decorated Native American. Similarly, I discovered an entire company of Indian sharpshooters from Michigan who fought with distinction in the Civil War. The book's section on the Indian Wars includes a lengthy account of Plains Indian sharpshooting, too. The most acclaimed shooter at the Battle of Bunker Hill was

Salem Poor, a black, whose image appeared on a bicentennial postage stamp in 1976. And when it comes to women, I did extensive research on Russian female snipers of World War II, finding that some were merely propaganda symbols and others were genuine heroes. These accounts were included along with all the others because they're great stories about great shooters.



Tell us of some surprising things you learned during the book's research and writing.

My most surprising discovery was the Confederate Army's employment of African American sharpshooters, which I've documented thoroughly. One of these sharpshooters, Holt Collier, later was a hunting guide for President Theodore Roosevelt and even has a National Wildlife Refuge named for him in Mississippi, where he is officially recognized as a Confederate Army veteran. In the area of technology, I was surprised to find that the Austrian army actually deployed air rifle sharpshooters during the Napoleonic Wars and that these weapons proved deadly.

How important is sniping in the fighting in Iraq today?

More so than any previous American conflict, the conditions in Iraq have spurred a dramatic growth of, and reliance on, snipers. As Iraq's insurgency took shape and fighting grew in heavily populated areas, the need for placing shots precisely – and thereby avoiding civilian casualties – grew as well. In many instances, U.S. snipers have engaged enemy fighters that could not have otherwise been fired on without extensive collateral damage. American snipers also have proven to be an extremely valuable counter to insurgents planting improvised explosive devices. And their ability to infiltrate without detection and invisibly observe areas of interest has been an important means of surveilling suspected insurgent locations.

(For a longer discussion with Major Plaster, go to www.paladin-press.com.)

