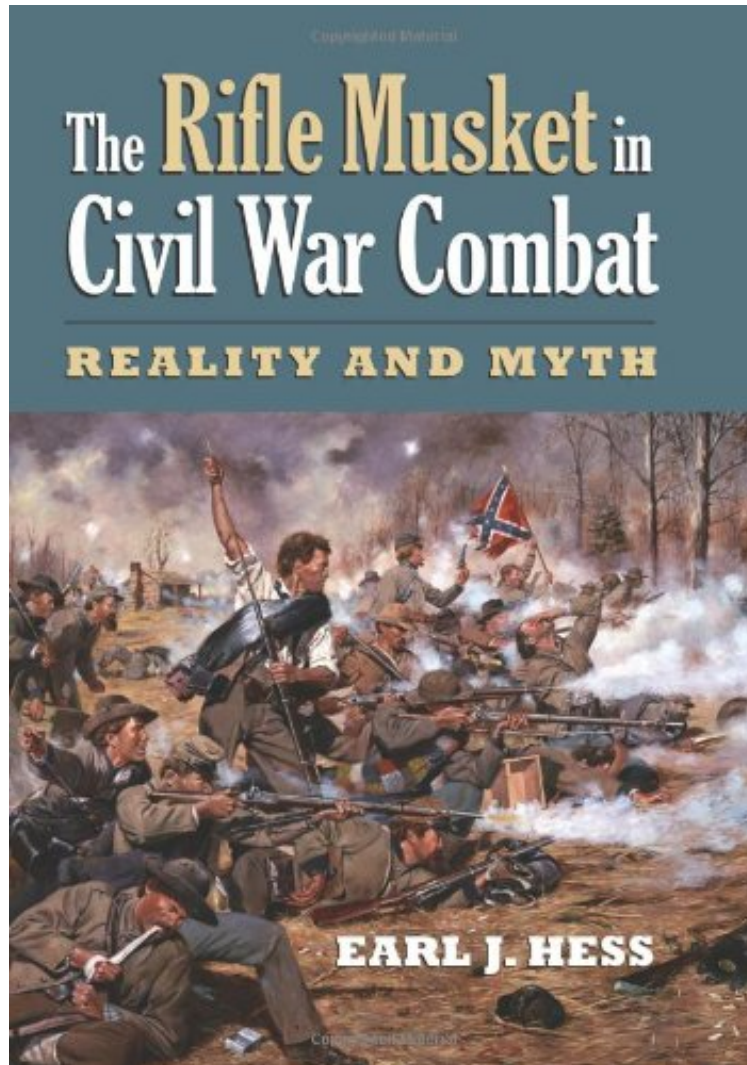


(Library ebook) The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth (Modern War Studies)

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Earl J. Hess

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Earl J. Hess : The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth (Modern War Studies) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth (Modern War Studies):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The font was a bit small but the information was ...By Feldmar Twomblebee The font was a bit small but the information was well presented and the reference value hard to over rate. 9 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Interesting history but very little personal experience to back it

upBy Charlie LURPThe author seems to be totally convinced a smooth bore musket is as accurate at 100 yards as a rifled musket. Not once did he give any proof that he had personally fired either to determine this. Either weapon is easily available today in historically accurate reproductions. A smooth bore musket ball may have adequate force at 100 yards and a large group of troops firing volleys would no doubt hit a number of their enemy by sheer luck. That is not the same as an individual soldier singling out his target and carefully firing at him. I've fired both weapons I know which musket I would put my faith in. The fact the troops did not receive proper marksmanship training with the rifled musket doesn't make the smoothbore a superior weapon. It just means training should have been improved. 17 of 27 people found the following review helpful. Pity the Civil War scholarBy Patrick L. BoyleI read that there were something like six thousand books on the Civil War. So I realized that I would never be a 'real' Civil War expert. Now that I have read this book I have developed some compassion for those poor SOBs who are professional Civil War scholars. Every sensible issue has long been thoroughly discussed. In order to write something 'new' a scholar must search for a new perspective - a nugget of new truth in this well scrutinized ground. Hess states his thesis in the first sentences of the prolog. Before the war experts expected that the rifled musket would allow engagements at several hundred yards - far more than the 50 yards engagement distance of smoothbores. In fact the rifled musket was used by main battle lines at only about 60-70 yards. That's it. That's the whole point of the book. Hess also indulges in what another reviewer called "voodoo ballistics". He thinks that a rifle's projectile follows a parabolic trajectory but that a smoothbore musket's ball flies level. He claims that the soldiers inevitably fired over the heads of the enemy with the new rifles because they never understood this fact(?). I know this thesis is wrongheaded because Hess himself proves it in subsequent chapters. The real revolution was not in rifling so much as it was in ammunition. The Minnie ball was a fast loading projectile. Rifles have been around for centuries but they had always had the trade off of accuracy for rate of fire. The Minnie ball suddenly erased the speed penalty of the muzzle loading rifle. Its introduction was expected by the experts of the day to revolutionize the battle field - and it did - just not in the way they had predicted. With smoothbore muskets and linear tactics the engagement distance was about 50 yards or less. Some expected that with rifles that distance would be 100 or 200 hundred yards. Hess's point is that this expectation proved wrong as indeed it did. But so what? The rifle had many other profound effects. Hess's book has a chapter on snipers. Remember there is no such thing as a sniper with a smoothbore gun. Hess's book also has a chapter on skirmishers. Again skirmishing requires rifles. Infantry men operating alone or in small groups couldn't be effective with smoothbores. Muskets were always used in massed groups. He has chart after chart showing skirmishers and snipers engaging at great distances: 200, 500, 800, 1500, and 2000 yards. Compare that with his statistic of smoothbore accuracy. At 62 yards less than half of shots hit the target - a target that was 5.5 feet wide and 10 feet tall (roughly the size of a man on horseback). Hess relates how Civil War soldiers on both sides when in trenches had to keep their heads down. If they stuck their head up they would have it blown off. This is a reality of a battlefield only where there are rifles. A smoothbore musket just can't hit small targets. Officers in the musket period considered such pot shots just a waste of ammunition. Consider also the tactics of the French and the English in the previous big conflicts waged with smoothbores. The French formed a tightly packed column that marched slowly toward the enemy. Almost every General on both sides knew about Napoleon and his tactics. But no one ever adopted the slow moving column, because the rifle musket made such a tactic suicidal. We know that on the battlefield soldiers with smoothbores (mostly Confederates) quickly swapped them for rifles. Just as they preferred breach loaders and repeaters. Hess claims that smoothbores were just as effective as rifles. I guess those soldiers hadn't read this book. Hess is just flat out wrong when he implies that the adoption of the rifle had little effect. He can only get away with this silly statement because he sets up a straw man expectation which he then refutes. The poor doofus is so desperate to say something original that he denies the obvious.

The Civil War's single-shot, muzzle-loading musket revolutionized warfare-or so we've been told for years. Noted historian Earl J. Hess forcefully challenges that claim, offering a new, clear-eyed, and convincing assessment of the rifle musket's actual performance on the battlefield and its impact on the course of the Civil War. Many contemporaries were impressed with the new weapon's increased range of 500 yards, compared to the smoothbore musket's range of 100 yards, and assumed that the rifle was a major factor in prolonging the Civil War. Historians have also assumed that the weapon dramatically increased casualty rates, made decisive victories rare, and relegated cavalry and artillery to far lesser roles than they played in smoothbore battles. Hess presents a completely new assessment of the rifle musket, contending that its impact was much more limited than previously supposed and was confined primarily to marginal operations such as skirmishing and sniping. He argues further that its potential to alter battle line operations was virtually nullified by inadequate training, soldiers' preference for short-range firing, and the difficulty of seeing the enemy at a distance. He notes that bullets fired from the new musket followed a parabolic trajectory unlike those fired from smoothbores; at mid-range, those rifle balls flew well above the enemy, creating two killing zones between which troops could operate untouched. He also presents the most complete discussion to date of the development of skirmishing and sniping in the Civil War. Drawing upon the observations and reflections of the soldiers themselves, Hess offers the most compelling argument yet made regarding the actual use of the rifle musket

and its influence on Civil War combat. Engagingly written and meticulously researched, his book will be of special interest to Civil War scholars, buffs, re-enactors, and gun enthusiasts alike.

“Hess hits a bull’s-eye with this fresh, provocative book.”—Daniel Sutherland, author of *Seasons of War: The Ordeal of a Confederate Community, 1861–1865* “A most welcome, meticulous, important, and easy-to-read addition to the literature.”—Paddy Griffith, author of *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* “Should be required reading, not just for students of the U.S. Civil War, but for anyone interested in the history of warfare.”—Mark Grimsley, author of *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May–June 1864* “A landmark study.”—William C. Davis, author of *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy*

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About the Author Earl J. Hess holds the Stewart W. McClelland Chair in History at Lincoln Memorial University and has published ten previous books on the Civil War, including "The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat", also from Kansas, and, most recently, "Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee: Field Fortifications in the Overland Campaign".