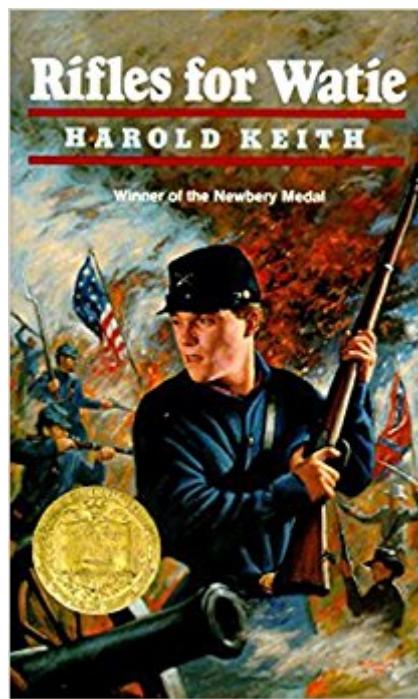


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# Rifles For Watie



## Synopsis

Jeff Bussey walked briskly up the rutted wagon road toward Fort Leavenworth on his way to join the Union volunteers. It was 1861 in Linn County, Kansas, and Jeff was elated at the prospect of fighting for the North at last. In the Indian country south of Kansas there was dread in the air; and the name, Stand Watie, was on every tongue. A hero to the rebel, a devil to the Union man, Stand Watie led the Cherokee Indian Nation fearlessly and successfully on savage raids behind the Union lines. Jeff came to know the Watie men only too well. He was probably the only soldier in the West to see the Civil War from both sides and live to tell about it. Amid the roar of cannon and the swish of flying grape, Jeff learned what it meant to fight in battle. He learned how it felt never to have enough to eat, to forage for his food or starve. He saw the green fields of Kansas and Oklahoma laid waste by Watie's raiding parties, homes gutted, precious corn deliberately uprooted. He marched endlessly across parched, hot land, through mud and slashing rain, always hungry, always dirty and dog-tired. And, Jeff, plain-spoken and honest, made friends and enemies. The friends were strong men like Noah Babbitt, the itinerant printer who once walked from Topeka to Galveston to see the magnolias in bloom; boys like Jimmy Lear, too young to carry a gun but old enough to give up his life at Cane Hill; ugly, big-eared Heifer, who made the best sourdough biscuits in the Choctaw country; and beautiful Lucy Washbourne, rebel to the marrow and proud of it. The enemies were men of another breed - hard-bitten Captain Clardy for one, a cruel officer with hatred for Jeff in his eyes and a dark secret on his soul. This is a rich and sweeping novel-rich in its panorama of history; in its details so clear that the reader never doubts for a moment that he is there; in its dozens of different people, each one fully realized and wholly recognizable. It is a story of a lesser-known part of the Civil War, the Western campaign, a part different in its issues and its problems, and fought with a different savagery. Inexorably it moves to a dramatic climax, evoking a brilliant picture of a war and the men of both sides who fought in it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Keith presents the Civil War from a different viewpoint: that of a Kansas farm boy who joins the Union Army to protect the family farm from rebel Bushwackers across the Missouri border. Like Michael Shaara's *THE KILLER ANGELS* (Pulitzer Prize winner about the Battle of Gettysburg), this book presents a fair portrayal of conditions and mindsets on both sides of the Mason/Dixon line. There are no clearcut military antagonists--just men in opposing uniforms. Keith's detailed research offers a variety of reasons for enlisting with one side or another, plus the tragic case of displaced Native Americans who were caught in the political crossfire of a nation undergoing rebirth. Sixteen-year-old Jeff (Jefferson Davis Bussey, if you please) serves his country first in the Infantry then in the Cavalry. While on a dangerous scouting expedition (Spy mission), he is tricked into enlisting with Col. Watie's Mounted Cherokee Rifles. Poor Jeff endures more than the normal risks of battle though: he falls for a Rebel gal--part Indian too. Befriended by kind and generous Southerners, he experiences increasing guilt as he grows to respect his erstwhile enemies. He develops true bonds with the common soldiers who become his new messmates. Yet Jeff privately realizes that time is relentlessly drawing him to the brink of a fateful decision: when he must choose which ideal (Union or division) to champion. Whichever way he goes, he will be branded a traitor by former friends--either his sweetheart or his family! How can the youth maintain his honor, especially when his heart is set on his sleeve? Even worse: he knows a dangerous secret about a sadistic Union officer who might well shoot or stab him during battle--just to assure his silence.

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