



# **Riding Into War: The Memoir of a Horse Transport Driver, 1916-1919 (New Brunswick Military Heritage Series)**

*James Robert Johnston*

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On the ghastly battlefields of the First World War, Jimmie Johnston drove teams or pack horses carrying ammunition and hauling guns to the front lines. One night, Johnston was hauling guns back from the front line. Suddenly, in the darkness and pouring rain, he, his team, the wagon, and the guns pitched into an old trench. After disentangling the horses from their harness, Johnston found a trenching tool, dug away the side of the trench, and led the horses out of what had become a sea of mud. Then he harnessed them again, took them back to camp, cleaned them up, and returned to the trench to find the wagon blown to bits by German fire.

Jimmie Johnston, the farm boy, endured nearly three years under constant artillery fire. Two decades after the war ended, he wrote this memoir of his wartime experiences on a trip back to Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele. In *Riding into War*, Johnston marvels at how jokes and pranks and the funny side of even the most terrible events have stuck in his mind. Yet, even in the face of horror and suffering, his sense of humour rarely deserted him. The scenes he relates destroyed many men's sanity, but Johnston's ability to laugh and the practical need to care for his horses no doubt contributed to his recovery. After the war, he says, "my nerves were not too good, and I remember a lot of nights I would get up when no one else was around and have to go for a long walk." But, he concludes, "After some time, this seemed to wear off and soon back to a new life again."

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