

# Reflections on the State of Canadian Army History in the Two World Wars

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example, that a thorough understanding of early exploration is best achieved through the sensitive interpretation of original maps. Nevertheless, one must accept that the first volume of this *Atlas* is not and was not intended to be a complete survey of Canadian history prior to 1800. We should be thankful for the extraordinary range of what was accomplished.

It now remains to be seen what influence the *Atlas* will have on scholarship and in the classroom. Will it, like that other grand project of collective scholarship, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, prove too complex, almost too large, for easy and quick assimilation?<sup>3</sup> Certainly the principles behind the craft of the modern cartographer are not always self-evident, and many of the plates included in this volume will require patience and attention from the uninitiated. One also suspects that undergraduate students will find it difficult to incorporate the visual lessons of the *Atlas* into their written assignments. These problems might have been anticipated and perhaps alleviated by, for instance, making slides of the plates available for class room use, providing a modest manual on techniques, or simply recommending sample assignments based on the *Atlas*. Contributors to this project have given us so much that we greedily ask for a little more.

In asking more from others, historians must also ask more from themselves. A determined effort must be made to acquire the skills necessary to take advantage of modern cartography and a conscious decision made to exploit maps in the classroom. Indeed, the same could be said for visual materials of all kinds, from portrait miniatures to daguerreotypes. If some subjects can be explained more clearly with maps, others can be with paintings or photographs. The challenge is to start from visual evidence: structure a seminar around a painting rather than an article, or build a lecture from explorers' maps rather than their written accounts. Not to do so is to close rather than open avenues to a better understanding of the past.

M. BROOK TAYLOR

<sup>3</sup> One might note the strange fact that the *Atlas* does not always adopt the standard spelling for personal names established by the *DCB*.

## Reflections on the State of Canadian Army History in the Two World Wars

A GENERATION AGO THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE consensus among Canadian historians about what was important and what was not. It helped that the

leading Canadian military historians of the day, Charles Stacey, George Stanley and Richard Preston, were academics before taking up military careers, and that their political-diplomatic approach to defence issues had nation building as a central theme. Their sophisticated scholarship also set them apart from the wider perception of military historians as retired colonels and their field as largely 'drum and trumpet' history.

Political-diplomatic history fell out of favour in the 1970s, and the idea that war and military affairs have been a major formative influence on the nation has less currency today. But military history, like all other fields, has changed since then as well. In many respects it appears to have become subsumed in a welter of new methodologies, and a plague of buff books in local bookstores. It has also become more introspective, driven into micro-histories which do not lend themselves to easy use by other fields. Yet in the process military history has also developed a stronger academic base, and many in the field are now academics with little or no practical military experience. Military historians, it is true, still travel with a rather peculiar crowd. As John Keegan has observed, military history is, "a garment loose and ample enough to be thrown over the most heterogeneous range of subjects and activities: the study of uniforms, buttons, and badges, the 're-enactment' of historic battles, the collection of antique firearms". Academic military historians, he continued, tend to "shrink from association with such vulgarities and inanities: by convulsive reaction, many have come to insist that they themselves are not historians of war at all, but of institutions, administration, or ideas — armies, conscription, strategic thought".<sup>1</sup> American academic military historians have noted the same phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> They too have been tainted by their 'fellow travellers', and by their own penchant for lining study walls with old service rifles and memorabilia.

At the root of Keegan's point lies an ongoing argument over just what 'military history' is. His protestations against the retreat of 'academic' military historians from the front reflects a view strongly held among a group of British scholars in the field — that military history proper is focused ultimately on battle. After all, that is what armies, navies and air forces exist to do. The object of British ire is what Americans have come to call 'the new military history', the study of the soldier as proletariat, the impact of military service on society, and the like — in essence, history that stands with its back to the firing line.<sup>3</sup> At issue is whether the new school of military history is military history at all. Keegan and his British colleagues argue that writing about battle is what distinguishes

1 John Keegan, "War and Man's Past", *History Today*, 33 (January 1983), pp.27-32. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Brent Wilson for providing me access to his collection of material on military historiography, which has helped immeasurably in sorting it all out.

2 Allan R. Millett echoes Keegan's point in "The State of American Military History in the United States", *Military Affairs*, April 1977, pp. 58-113, esp. p. 59.

3 For a compendium of British views see, "What is Military History", *History Today*, 34

military historians from all others. What Keegan, Howard, Chandler and Duffy (to name a few) seek to discover is what influence developments at large have on the way armies are organized to fight.<sup>4</sup> American academic military historians have, on the other hand, shunned the problems of battle, preferring to study civil-military relations, institutions, policy, planning and (in a more traditional way) campaigns.

The writing of Canadian military history is not spared these pressures nor those of the market place. As a rule, much of what passes for military history in Canada falls into two broad categories: the popular accounts which approximate the 'old' military history, and the academic ones which follow the American model of the 'new' military history. These historiographical issues serve as the starting point for this essay on the contribution of some recent books to the army's historiography.

The Canadian experience of war until 1939-45 was almost exclusively on land, and the traditions of local militias and of defence of a land frontier are as old as human habitation in this country. It is therefore not surprising that the doyens of modern military history in Canada, Stacey and Stanley, both focussed on the army, and that the army has been very well served by good, solid surveys and official histories.<sup>5</sup> A familiar chronology has been long established, and it is kept current for new generations by the occasional re-release of such standards as D.J. Goodspeed's, *The Road Past Vimy: The Canadian Corps 1914-1918*

(December 1984), pp. 5-13. British distaste for the 'new' military history is also evident from the comments made in the preface of Christopher Duffy's recent *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (London, 1987); see p. viii.

- 4 For a detailed summary of what the 'new' military history of the US has to offer see the seminal article by Richard Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospects for Research", *American Historical Review*, 86 (June 1981), pp. 553-67 and Edward M. Coffman, "The New American Military History", *Military Affairs*, 48 (January 1984), pp. 1-5.
- 5 Charles P. Stacey was, for a very long time, the official historian of the Canadian Army and the Army's official histories of the Second World War were prepared under his direction. Two of the volumes (*Six Years of War*, vol. I, and *The Victory Campaign*, vol. III), Stacey authored himself. His stamp on the earlier military history of Canada was set by *Canada and the British Army, 1846-1871* (London, 1936), and *The Military Problems of Canada* (Toronto, 1940). Stacey has also written a superb two volume work on Canadian foreign and defence policy, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies* (Toronto, 1977 and 1981). George F. Stanley has been noted, since the publication of his acclaimed *Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London, 1936), as an historian of pre-20th century Canadian military history. His publications in this field include *New France: The Last Phase 1744-1760* (Toronto, 1968), *Canada Invaded: 1775-1776* (Toronto, 1973), and recently *The War of 1812: The Land Operations* (Toronto, 1983). Stanley also worked under Stacey on the official Army histories, and in 1954 published *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* (Toronto), which, although now dated, remains one of the best single volume accounts of Canada's military past.

(Toronto, General Publishing, 1987). Goodspeed's is an excellent and provocative primer on the exploits of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The general pattern of the war is clearly explained and the milestones in the development of the Canadian Corps, such as formation of units, promotions and key battles, are all included. This is solid, one might say, traditional military history. Goodspeed's hesitant steps at explaining the disastrous nature of the early years of the First World War and the ultimate triumph of the Corps by 1917-18 can be easily summarized: the deficiencies of an 'arthritic' British officer corps, led by an idiot (General Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force which included the Canadians), were eventually overcome by Canadian native intelligence and the brilliance of Sir Arthur Currie. Given the limited space, Goodspeed was not able to say much more, and he is unable in a few short pages to make a persuasive case for the success of Canadian reservists. But that doesn't matter. The simple interpretation put forth by Goodspeed of the nature of the war and the Canadian contribution to it has proven remarkably durable.

Those looking for more colour and greater depth in available accounts of the CEF can now turn to a trilogy of books by Dan Dancocks, the author of a commendable popular biography of Major General Sir Arthur Currie several years ago.<sup>6</sup> Dancocks followed his interest in the General by pursuing the speculation (advanced after the war) that Currie was in line for Haig's job after the battle of Passchendaele in late 1917. The result was *Legacy of Valour: The Canadians at Passchendaele* (Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 1986). The battle is best remembered for the deep, drowning mud and the ultimate futility of Haig's flawed strategy. For the Canadians, Passchendaele actually represented a significant victory in a year of achievements. It had all begun on Vimy Ridge in April, followed in August by Hill 70 and culminating in the Canadian capture of Passchendaele Ridge in November — the saving grace for Haig's failed attempt to free the Belgian coast. Currie emerges from this sea of mud and wire squeaky clean. He had demanded and received additional equipment, and fought the battle on his own terms. Dancocks handles the lead-up and the battle well enough, doing a good job of describing Canadian preparations on the ground to improve communications and battlefield mobility. The last, and very substantial portion of the book betrays the author's interest in pursuing the idea that the resulting Canadian success poised Currie on the brink of command of the BEF. It is a captivating idea, but one which 'the establishment' finds unconvincing.<sup>7</sup>

*Legacy of Valour*, like Dancocks' other books, is solid stuff, based largely but by no means exclusively on secondary sources and a selective review of some archival material. The mis-titled *Canada and the Great War: Spearhead to Victory* (Edmonton, Hurtig, 1987), which covers the 100 days campaign of 1918,

6 Dan G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: a biography* (Toronto, Methuen, 1985).

7 See Stacey's review of the book in *The Canadian Historical Review*, 4 (1988), pp. 551-2.

and *Welcome to Flanders Fields: The First Canadian Battle of the Great War, Ypres, 1915* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1988) are what academics would describe pejoratively as 'well written, briskly paced, popular accounts' — a polite euphemism perhaps for Nicholson's *Official History of the CEF* with a little colour and more enthusiastic writing.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, they are more than that. They bring together a broad range of material and as popular accounts do a superb job of conveying the basic facts — accurately — and of showing the impact of war on individuals through the latter's own words.

As for explaining how the battles were fought, popular accounts leave many of us buried — like countless Germans — under a barrage of artillery and operational statistics. The First World War, we are told, was essentially a function of gunnery and engineering, and generations of writers have been fascinated by the amounts of things consumed. At both Vimy and Passchendaele the success of Canadian operations is attributed almost exclusively to operational planning and artillery fire plans. Good World War I stuff this, but if war was simply making good plans we could all be generals. Although Dancocks makes little of it, his account of the Canadian attack at Passchendaele notes that the infantry reduced German strong points using fire and movement tactics based on a variety of weapons within the infantry platoons. One is left to wonder at what happened to the mindless linear tactics which have been the bread and butter of World War I historians for generations. And what about the reference to 'strong points'? Are those trenches? The Canadians did indeed meet typical German trenches on Vimy ridge six months before, but it was the only portion of the western front still held in such a fashion by the Germans. The rest had switched to the dispersed and harder to hit strong point system encountered at Passchendaele. And how was the long neglected battle of Hill 70 (in August 1917) actually fought?

Improved tactical method is seldom the product of a single battle, not even of a large one. It is a dynamic process which draws its impetus from a developing awareness that the old system does not work under any circumstance, from an accumulation of evidence that other methods have been successful, and from a broad based acceptance that change in a given direction is the solution to the problem. Remarkably, no one has yet produced a systematic analysis of that process within the Canadian Corps. To date the Canadian claim for battlefield superiority rests largely on results, and for many perhaps that is enough. But this failure to write about battle without dealing with the process at work is characteristic of the old military history — and one reason why it has been found so unsatisfactory.

Canadian success in 1918 has also been attributed to some fairly bald reasons:

8 G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: The Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa, 1962).

the infusion of elements of the 5th Division into the Corps, its unique reorganization, and the fact that the Canadians stood aside while the British and the French took the weight of the German offensives in the spring. The Canadian Corps which smashed through the German front on 8 August 1918 to give Ludendorff what he would remember as "the Black Day of the German Army" was really a small, well equipped and rested field army. If there was any peculiar genius in all this, we are told, it was Currie, who had the gumption to develop the Corps in the way he liked. But it all smacks of solid administration, sound engineering and bigger battalions, and is based on the dubious notion that for a number of reasons the other British formations were incapable of "following" the Canadian example.

One might have expected more, then, of the tactical genius of Sir Arthur Currie in A.M.J. Hyatt's recent military biography of our most famous general, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, in collaboration with the Canadian War Museum, 1987). Like all Currie's biographers, Hyatt celebrates the general's obvious talents for organization, his political acumen and his ability to take a good idea and make it better, but like the rest Hyatt does not make a convincing case for the distinct nature of the Canadian Corps as a fighting unit. As Stacey observes, Hyatt "sticks pretty close to his last" in this work, concentrating on the essential military highlights of Currie's career, and steering well clear of his pre- and post-war life.<sup>9</sup> Hyatt's is a concise, well written and well researched work which makes an important contribution to the literature on the war generally and on his subject in particular. But although this is a good book, Stacey is also correct in asserting that we do need much more on Currie's role in the development of the tactics and doctrine that made the corps so successful.

In no small measure the reluctance to get down to the mechanics of battle, evident in Hyatt's work and others, is one which afflicts the field generally. Hyatt's book may well serve to exorcise our fixation with Currie and encourage others to probe more deeply into the nuts and bolts of the Corps experience of fighting. A better understanding of how the Canadians fit into the whole picture on the western front really depends on a better understanding of what their neighbors were doing. In short, we need more work on battle management and tactics for the British, French and German armies. We have to admit that there was a process underway in the First World War and that there was, in the end, the development of successful methods for fighting. This notion flies in the face of conventional wisdom, which views the war as an utterly mindless act locked in the futile battles of 1915-1916, and is not one which 'sells' well to academic colleagues.

Indeed, the First World War remains such a catastrophe in popular and

9 Stacey, *CHR*, 4 (1988), p. 552.

professional consciousness that objective analysis of its military operations seems impossible. The old military history, with its rather bland or glorifying approach to battle, is clearly unacceptable, and the 'new military history' with its markedly different approach to war is unlikely to tackle the problems of battle method at all. Until there is some serious modern scholarship on British generalship in the First World War, including more critical work on Rawlinson, Plumer, Gough, Byng, and Monash as well as Currie, we will never get closer to a proper understanding of how the practical problems of unlocking the Western front were solved. Closer to home, we also need work on those faceless division and brigade commanders who shared the burden of developing and implementing the changes which made the Corps successful. As William Stewart demonstrated in his unpublished M.A. thesis, there was far more to the success of the Canadian Corps than Sir Arthur Currie.<sup>10</sup> Who were these men — Watson, Mercer, Macdonell, Brutinel, and their like — who commanded the divisions and key elements of the Canadian Corps? Popular, traditional military history, with its interest in battle at the highest and lowest ends, will not uncover them, and the 'new military history' shuns their mundane but essential military problems. Too bad some of our academics are not motivated by the same enthusiasm for their past that fires Dancocks. Too bad they leave dormant such fertile ground for profitable research. We have had enough on Currie and probably on the private soldier to keep us sated for a while. What we need lies in between, and it is a hard and academically treacherous seam to mine.

Troops in the field are, in any event, only the tip of a very large organization which extends back to the Home Front and has deep roots in the local soil. Here the 'new' approach to military history does help to bridge some of the gaps between military history proper and other fields. Ron Haycock's *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1853-1916* (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, in collaboration with the Canadian War Museum, 1986) is a case in point. Hughes' principle claim to fame was his period as Minister of Militia from 1911 until 1916, a tenure which witnessed the final preparations for war, the mobilization and the early battles of the CEF. Long an enigmatic figure, portrayed — accurately enough — as a bit of a lunatic possessed of enormous energy and political savvy, Hughes emerges from Haycock's exhaustive study as a more human and understandable character. Haycock's painstaking research in the absence of a collection of private papers is a superb indication of what can be accomplished by sheer hard work and determination. The result is an excellent, if stolidly written, biography of one of

10 William Stewart, "Attack Doctrine in the Canadian Corps, 1916-1918", M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1982. Stewart's contribution to placing Currie in the broader context of the Corps itself is acknowledged by Stephen Harris in his recent *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto, 1988), p. 259.



our most important military and political figures. In his assessment of Hughes' motives, for example, Haycock tackles the difficult question of English Canadian nationalism. What emerges is a vivid portrait of that bizarre combination of nationalism and imperialism that co-existed within the hearts of English Canadians at the turn of the century. For Hughes, as for many of his contemporaries, the future of Canada lay in its ultimate domination of the empire itself. The pursuit of Sam Hughes also takes Haycock into the realms of government policy, mobilization planning, industrial planning, wartime munitions production, recruiting for the CEF and the like. His account of the overseas administration of the CEF and the problems of wartime contracting are succinct and thorough. But in the end it is Hughes as Minister of Militia, and his impact on the shape of the Canadian army during those crucial years, which form the focus of Haycock's work. Accordingly, and perhaps assuming that those familiar with events at the front will be able to form their own conclusions on what this all meant to troops in the field, Haycock stays well clear of battles — at least those between Canadians and Germans. It is the battles he does tackle, those in Ottawa and among Canadians of all stripes, which make the book useful to a wider audience.

Some would no doubt argue that Haycock's book is not military history at all, since it fails to draw those hard links between the story he tells and the front itself, but these distinctions are largely academic. Clearly, Hughes had a profound impact on the very character of Canada's First World War experience and therefore on the shape of the nation itself. It was Hughes, after all, who bungled the enthusiasm of French Canadians for the war and left them without due representation overseas. It was also Hughes who sent the permanent force infantry off to garrison Bermuda and the amateurs of the militia to Europe to destroy the German empire. Ironically, it was also Hughes who was rejected by those amateur soldiers once they had endured a year at the front. The reasons for the alienation of Hughes from his Army are complex, but revolve around his unsuitability for his post and the increasing professionalism of the militia once in the field. Hughes' off-hand methods of enlistment, the willy-nilly way in which he allowed the Canadian establishment in England to develop and his refusal to either see or do anything about the problems he had created are dealt with at length in Des Morton's *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982).

Like Haycock's book on Hughes, Morton's *Politics* is a meeting ground for fields. Although himself a 'military historian' and writing with an eye on what this all means to troops at the front, Morton's book is also about the constitutional history of the country. Dealing as it does with relations between the British and Canadian governments over the administration of troops and the constant need to demarcate areas of jurisdiction and responsibility, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics* fits well into the more traditional interpretation of war as a formative influence on the development of the country from a colony to a nation. Moreover, it does

so in a way far more palatable to other fields than the earlier appeals to valour and sacrifice on the battlefields.

Academically trained military historians have long recognized the links between the political, economic and social backgrounds of armies and their effectiveness on the battlefield. As a rule, military historians draw on these other fields to interpret events at the front, but the process cuts both ways. Morton's latest book, written in conjunction with Glenn Wright, is a classic example. *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life 1915-1930* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988) tackles that grey area between the impact of society on the armed forces and the impact of war on society. Here the formative influence of war in Canadian history begins to reassert itself. Morton and Wright look at the treatment of wounded and discharged veterans of the First World War, and at the government programs and veterans' organization developed to support their re-integration into Canadian society. Of necessity, the authors look at the state of Canadian social programs and in the care and attention paid to the wreckage of the western front the authors find the origins of the modern Canadian welfare system. And one glimpses the power of veterans' organizations in shaping post-war social and government policy.

The notion that war gave rise to a broader based social conscience is not new, but as Morton once observed, it is indeed remarkable that so little effort has been given to tracing the impact of wartime service on the post-war politics and structure of the nation. One might reasonably expect that putting a major portion of the population in uniform and subjecting a substantial number of impressionable people to possible death or dismemberment would have had some impact on Canadian society after the shooting stopped. In wrestling with this issue Wright and Morton have produced a significant contribution to Canadian historiography. Whether or not it is military history is a moot point.

A decidedly new history — or annales school — approach to the links between society and war is pursued in Jean Pierre Gagnon's *The 22nd (French-Canadian) Battalion, 1914-1919: Socio-military history* (Ottawa, Supply and Services, 1986), a study of the Van Doos at war from 1914 to 1918. Gagnon's is the first in a new series of 'socio-military history' from the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters. The primary focus of this volume is the structure of the basic infantry fighting unit, the battalion, and in this case the social structure of the only French Canadian battalion to fight on the Western Front. Gagnon's study employs an exhaustive use of the personnel records of the federal government in order to produce socio-ethnic data on enlistments, discharges, regional and linguistic distinctions, courts martial and disciplinary actions. His general conclusions, that the Battalion was largely French speaking, Roman Catholic and Quebec based, confirm conventional wisdom. More importantly, his methodology and approach serve as a model for future studies

(and he is now extending his research to the whole of 5 brigade), which are needed in order to place the Van Doos experience into a solid context. Although Gagnon's real interest is not in how the 22e battalion performed in battle, he gives the front more than passing note and in pursuit of this military focus he tends to stay clear of the broader arguments over the patterns of Canadian social history. His reasoned and academically rigorous dissection of one battalion from the Great War was an auspicious start for the new series. Unfortunately, the same high standards are not evident in the second volume of the series, Jean Pariseau's *French Canadians and Bilingualism in the Canadian Forces, vol. I, 1763-1969: The Fear of a Parallel Army* (Ottawa, Department of Supply and Services, 1986). The very idea of such a project seems daunting, fraught with constitutional and emotional minefields, and the need to reconcile conflicting views of what Canada was and is. One is left to wonder why the Directorate went to press with such a weak manuscript.

Pariseau's book is essentially a chronology of the failure of English Canada to recognize and accommodate the French equitably within a national institution — the armed forces. Unfortunately, much of the effort is spent in recounting what is already well known: that until 1969 Canada's forces were essentially anglophone and that the role for unilingual francophones was limited to service in infantry rifle companies — i.e. cannon fodder. For French Canadians to make their way in this milieu they had to master English; failure to do so denied them access to a host of technical and higher command posts. Given the scope and fundamental importance of the subject, one might have expected a broader based and more balanced approach to the issues. What is most distressing in a book on 'socio-military history' is the virtual absence of any effort to identify and address the social imperatives operating at each stage within Canadian society itself. The unwritten assumption here is that we are dealing with two parallel and symmetrical societies, different only in their size. Clearly this was never the case. French Canadian society until the First World War was largely rural in nature and until the 1950s its education system — apart from one school — was entirely non-technical. Moreover, until the post-World War Two era French Canada remained under the influence of a church and an elite who were content to develop an introspective society. One might have expected Pariseau to tackle the suggestion made by Des Morton that the alienation of French Canada from the military after confederation had something to do with their preference for a "French" system of compulsory universal militia training and not the volunteerism preferred by English Canada.<sup>11</sup> Obviously there is more to this story than simple Anglo-Canadian stupidity — although there was enough of

11 The point is made in Morton's "French Canada and War 1867-1917: The Military Background to the Conscription Crisis, 1917", in J.L. Granatstein and R.D. Cuff, eds, *War and Society in North America* (Toronto, 1971).

that. It would also have been useful to develop some comparison of how other multi-lingual forces functioned at each stage, and how in the Second World War non-English speaking forces coped with English as the *lingua franca* of high command and high technology. No one in 1939 could know that after 1940-41 the war would be both long and dominated by the Anglo-American axis. As in most Canadian discussions of language the whole affair is muddled by the fact that the two empires which have shaped our recent fortunes — the British and American — both speak English. This of course does not excuse the Canadian government for the attitude it took towards a major portion of its population. By the same token, the Directorate of History should not be excused for producing a profoundly unhistorical treatment of the problem.

Many of the themes discussed by Pariseau point to the on-going struggle within the military between social and military imperatives: between the need to balance social and functional military values, and play the politics upon which the fortunes of the services ultimately depend. It seems fair to say that the Canadian armed forces are perhaps more susceptible to the pressures of politics and society at large than are many armed forces by virtue of the fact that at bottom our security relies on the willingness of our friends — or guardians — to protect us. For most of our modern history Canadians muddled along playing politics with their armed forces and trusting in the British army and Royal Navy to keep us safe and permit us to prosper unharmed. The result was that our forces have been, on the whole, profoundly unprofessional.

This struggle between the requirement for professional competence and the imperative to use the armed forces for social and political aims is the subject of Stephen Harris' *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army 1860-1939* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988). Harris drives a clear and well posted route through a welter of literature and issues that mark the history of the army prior to the Second World War. His examination of the structure and the personal ties of the Canadian high command follows a familiar pattern: the battle to establish a permanent force, the argument over whether its purpose was to train the militia or to fight, the battles between British General Officers Commanding and Canadian Ministers over reform directed at professionalism, the muddle with Sir Sam Hughes, the high standard of professionalism within the Canadian Corps, and the return to a narrow, stilted professionalism between the two World Wars. Although Harris plows fields already worked in part by Morton, Stanley, Nicholson, Preston and others, his book marks a watershed in Canadian military history. It blends a body of more narrowly focused works on distinct periods or subjects with an exhaustive study of the original archives material to produce both a synthesis and a provocative work devoted to the military competence of the modern Canadian army. Few would contest Harris' assertion that the army before the First World War was unprofessional, or that the corps itself by 1917-18 was highly professional. More challenging is the suggestion that the officer corps in the inter-war years was unprofessional.

Although freed largely of the intrigues of ministers and nepotism, the tiny force was unable to overcome the influence of a parochial and penurious existence. More importantly, it was this flawed corps of professional officers who took the army into battle in the Second World War. Harris stops short of assessing the performance of the officer corps during that war, but the implications are clear enough. Historians are now in general agreement that the army of 1939-45 did not meet the same high standards displayed by the corps in the previous war, and Harris' work suggests a possible explanation for this change.

It is important to remember that the fortunes of the army in the two wars were shaped in each case by unique circumstances. The CEF fought its war better in all respects, and it helped that the corps never moved more than a few score miles in any particular direction for most of four years. It was not a case of the same ground, the same enemy and the same problems over and over again, but it approximated that by Second World War standards. The pace, complexity and lethality of war had increased dramatically by 1944, and the experience of soldiers to that point in unlocking the mysteries of their new problems had been uneven. The Second World War is characterized by discontinuities and more rapid technological change. The lessons of the desert, if they were learned at all, were not directly applicable to Italy, and the Italian experience bore no resemblance to the kind of fighting faced in Normandy. Some evidence of the complexity of that adaption process is evident in *Mud and Green Fields: The Memoirs of Major General George Kitching* (Langley, B.C., Batteline Books, 1986). The word 'some' is used advisedly. Kitching began the war as a 2nd Lieutenant and by 1944 found himself a Major General commanding the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. His baptism of fire as a division commander came south of Caen in early August 1944, in operations Tractable and Totalize. These were massive Canadian armoured thrusts down the Caen-Falaise highway intended to break through the German front and, by joining up with US forces near Argentan, seal the fate of the German 7th Army in the Falaise pocket. Like most memoirs, Kitching's says far too little about how he got to his lofty position, or how the army of the day tackled the essential problems of armoured warfare. Kitching follows the tendency of veterans to write on a level that assumes the reader either understands or is not interested in the practical military problems both he and the army had to face. Consequently, we get a few anecdotes, and some basic facts about his career prior to August 1944, and not much else. The lasting strength of Kitching's memoir is what he has to say about those armoured thrusts — his first and last battles in command of a division.

Tractable and Totalize have been celebrated as innovative, landmark battles for their use of massed armoured personnel carriers to transport infantry through the enemy defences and onto their objectives. The operations were also characterized by lavish use of aerial bombardment, which blasted corridors down which the Canadians were supposed to charge in armoured phalanxes. Although novel in concept, both operations broke down. Fourth Armoured's

role in Phase II of Totalize was to push through the bridgehead already achieved by the infantry. Dependence upon heavy bombers to clear the route through German positions and the decision to insert the Polish Armoured Division alongside squeezed the weight of the Division into an incredibly small frontage of 500 yards, enough for a single squadron of tanks — 14 in all. On this occasion the Germans were ready, the Allied aircraft bombed the Canadians, and the confused battle ended with two Canadian regiments lost, isolated and destroyed behind enemy lines. Tractable, a second attempt at the same thing, went little better. The great armoured phalanx was aligned again, albeit on a wider front; the Germans captured the plans and were waiting; the Air Force bombed the wrong troops again, destroying the headquarters of Kitching's leading brigade; and 4th Armoured plunged headlong into yet another salient with Germans fighting to maintain east-west communications across the axis of the Canadian advance as well as trying to halt its forward movement. For four crucial days Kitching's armoured brigade was without a brigadier; Simmonds intervened to change the thrust lines on several occasions; and Kitching lost control of his division. The battle stalled, and in the end Kitching got sacked.

The Canadians were slow in capturing Falaise and trapping the German 7th Army and historians have pointed the finger ever since. Kitching's performance in his first battle was no worse — and little better — than many, but he was not given a second chance. As a result, we get a spirited and insightful account in an otherwise disappointing memoir. Historians really do need more from memoirs than quiet reflection better suited to family albums. Lieutenant General Howard Graham's *Citizen and Soldier* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1987) is another example of this basically chronological, uncritical, and — in this case — badly edited genre. Despite his war service in command of a brigade in 1st Division and his post war stature as Chief of Staff, Graham has little to offer any but the casual reader.

A measure of what can be done is *The Memoirs of General Jean Allard* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1988). Allard availed himself of the services of a professional historian from the Directorate of History, Dr. Serge Bernier, and the result is a very good memoir which addresses major historical themes. The centre piece of Allard's career was his ultimately successful attempt to raise the profile and fortunes of Francophones within the armed forces and overseeing the unification of the armed forces which occurred just as Allard assumed responsibility for the post of Chief of the Defence Staff in 1966. Given the conciliatory nature of the man himself, it is perhaps not surprising that Allard stays well clear of controversy and pointed criticism. Nothing is said, for example, of the relative qualities of the senior officers under whom Allard served in Italy and Holland in the Second World War, of the effectiveness of the Van Doos in relation to other battalions of 3 Brigade or of the abilities of the brigadiers he served with. Here perhaps success has shaped and polished memory. Unlike Kitching, Allard received a battlefield promotion and went on

to demonstrate his competence as a brigadier. In short, Allard says too little about his wartime experience, even though a major portion of the book is devoted to it. His accounts of battles in Italy are insightful and add to the battle narratives and regimental accounts we have of those engagements. However, the important battles to Allard were clearly those fought late in his career over issues closest to his heart, and these naturally form the major focus of the work.

The Second World War is still recent enough to have its literature freshened periodically by memoirs. Some Second World War memoirs of recent years, among them Fred Cederberg's *The Long Road Home: The Autobiography of A Canadian Soldier in Italy in World War II* (Toronto, General Publishing, 1984) and Denis and Shelagh Whitaker's *Tug of War: The Canadian Victory that Opened Antwerp* (Toronto, Stoddart, 1984), are tightly focused, thoughtful and well written. They say something about war itself and the peculiar experiences of Canadians. For whatever reason, works by senior officers tend to be disappointing, perhaps because the war itself is just one phase of a longer military career, and it may not have been a positive one. It also suggests that Canadian senior officers in the Second World War were not innovators in tactics and doctrine. Rather they were implementors: striving like so many British divisional and brigade commanders to get the War Office theories to work, and with little time to find different solutions. Our corps, once in the field, were too small to effect much themselves and the First Canadian Army was, until March 1945, largely Canadian in name only.

That polyglot formation, First Canadian Army, is the subject of one recent publication by a veteran of General H.G. Crerar's headquarters, Jeffrey Williams. Williams' *The Long Left Flank: The Hard Fought Way to the Reich, 1944-45* (Toronto, Stoddart, 1988) is a popular history of the operations of First Canadian Army from the crossing of the Seine in August 1944 until the end of the German war. As a member of the army's headquarter's staff Williams is well poised to write this story, and his attempt to revive the memory of those trying days is an honorable one. He serves a useful purpose in reminding us of the twisted logic which led to the Canadian 'failure' to open the approaches to Antwerp in the fall of 1944, and the desperate battles of early 1945 which have been lost in the glare of better publicized events in late 1944. The story Williams recounts is well outlined in Stacey's *The Victory Campaign*,<sup>12</sup> and the reminiscences which dot the pages are drawn largely from published material. Williams does an excellent job of knitting it altogether — much as Dancocks has done for the earlier war. *The Long Left Flank* is, in the end, another "well written, briskly paced, popular account" and this time from "a vet". More's the pity; we have only a few years left to record first person accounts.

12 C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Canadian Army in the Second World War*, vol. III (Ottawa, 1960).

Williams' book reflects accurately the present trend in nostalgic publications, directed, one supposes, at veterans and their families who eagerly seek the gift for the man who wants little and has plenty of time for reflection. In this sense the current writing on the Second World War is markedly different from that available on the First. Ken Bell's latest book of photos of scenes of Canadian action in Europe, *The Way We Were* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988), caters to that reflective market as well. Bell's photos are evocative, and serve as a reminder that we still need a good photographic portrayal of the Canadian army at war. All too often photos are chosen for books at the last minute, and historians tend to use the original caption with little commentary. Those flat tin helmets that begin to appear in 3rd Division photos by late June and early July 1944 speak of casualties and replacements. And those shovels, the big ones, full spades, not the trifling combination pick and small hoe of the earlier years, that infantrymen — never ones to carry more than necessary — are seldom seen without after June 1944, suggest the need to dig quickly and deeply. One is left to wonder what secret modern soldiers have now that allows them to travel without the same companion.

Military historians are still given to using such banalities as 'the battalion crossed the start line' or was 'thrown across a river' as if everyone knew exactly what that implied. Such easy phrases for complex undertakings may well have served veterans in their writing, and the audience for whom they wrote. But wrapped-up in those simple phrases are the stuff of epic novels, and an experience so remote from postwar generations as to be virtually meaningless. What are being 'thrown' are hundreds of individual life stories. The method whereby it is done clearly imparts a conviction that it can be done and that the majority of those who do it will survive the crossing. Perhaps in the end we have to rely on the Cederberg's to convey what that bland phrase cannot, but there is still much academic historians can do. It is significant that the Carleton and York Regiment went off to war in 1939 with a 1916 British Army order of battle: that says a lot about the failure to learn the lessons of the last years of the First World War and a lot about the failures of the first years of the Second. It is important that when the 11th infantry brigade was introduced to battle on the Arielli River that the armoured regiment assigned to the assault operated in 'support' and not under command. The brigade lost 200 men, the armour regiment a single tank. And perhaps Kitching would have had a second chance if his division had had more infantry and Simmonds had not been so set upon overcoming the weakness in his equipment by reliance on massive aerial bombardments that, ultimately, proved ineffective. It is here where the weakness in our officers memoirs is most evident.

To date the army's Second World War experience seems mired in its memoir, nostalgia and operational phase. Apart from some articles and rumours of manuscripts nothing of the sort attempted by Morton, Gagnon or even Haycock has appeared for the Second War. Even Charles Stacey's latest book, with



Barbara Wilson, *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 1988), seems pitched more at the popular market than at serious scholars. The academics prefer to make their cases in journal articles, the veterans and popular presses reminiscence, the old military history of battles and campaigns soldiers on, and the new military history bides its time in the wings.

MARC MILNER

### Sport and Society: Towards a Synthetic History?

AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON, one that transcended class and gender boundaries, sport has been important to the Maritime consciousness since the mid-1850s. Any historian committed to comprehending and reconstructing the Maritime social milieux needs to understand how sport and leisure helped not merely to reflect but to define that society. This is hardly a new idea. In 1911, while debating the merits of baseball in the *Canadian Courier*, Ernest Paterson commented on the significance of the sport to Victorian society and pleaded for scholars of the future to include that dimension in any historical analysis of that era.

Any historian of this age and continent, failing to give due weight to professional baseball as a powerful influence in the life of the people, would be guilty of a serious omission. The game has, in truth, come to form a salient feature of the social conditions of our times..., no one taking note of these things could fail to perceive that baseball is playing a large part, a part of singular significance, in the life of the people.<sup>1</sup>

Few historians have heeded that call until recently. Analysis of cultural and leisure activities have rarely been considered as important as, for example, political events. Yet with the broadening interest in social history in recent years, the cultural significance of sports and athletics to society has become increasingly apparent. Academic historians, however, still tend to leave sport history to physical educationalists or to community historians who are often without any formal credentials. If their work does not meet the historian's expectations, they nonetheless are to be commended for taking steps, no matter how tentative

1 Ernest R. Patterson, "Two Views of Baseball: The Critic's View", *Canadian Courier*, 10, 17 (23 September 1911), pp. 6-7.