

In Great Waters: The Epic Story of the Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1945. Spencer Dunmore.

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In Great Waters: The Epic Story of the Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1945. Spencer Dunmore. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Inc., xiii, 342p., illu., appendix, notes, bibliog., index, hardcover, \$34.99, 1999. ISBN 0-7710-2929-2.

CHRISTOPHER SHARPE

THERE ARE ALREADY a great many books about the Battle of the Atlantic including the ground-breaking work by Hadley (1985), the magisterial books by Milner (1985, 1994), more recent works by Harbron (1993) and Sarty (1998, 2001) and the more popular works by Lawrence (1979), Lamb (1977, 1986) and Curry (1990). So it is legitimate to ask whether Dunmore unveils any new information, or provides any new interpretations or insights into the Battle. The answer is "no." This book is not based on new research, and simply re-tells a story already told, and told much better, elsewhere.

The book is poorly organized. For example, although the "air gap" is mentioned in places throughout the book, it is not really discussed until Chapter 13, where we are told that it has been closed. The book is also very unbalanced. There are three chapters (55 pages out of total of 301) devoted to a discussion of the battle for convoys SC122 and HX 229. This was a pivotal battle, but its treatment here is overly long, especially given the fact that Middlebrook (1976) devoted an entire book to it.

Spencer Dunmore began his writing career as a novelist, and this is very apparent in the current book. One of its serious problems is that the author apparently could not decide whether to write a serious non-fiction work, or an adventure pot-boiler. He attempts to make the story "dramatic" by the constant use of overblown prose, and it just does not work. Is the reader really expected to believe that a Hudson bomber "seemed to tremble with eagerness to get to grips with the U-boat"? Is it necessary to describe a U-boat as a "long, low, dull grey monster" or a "long and slender form sliding effortlessly through the water like some huge fish," or to include the following passage in a description of an attack on U89 by HMS *Anemone* in March, 1943?

Twenty minutes passed, an unreal interlude, during which men gazed into the sea trying to read its secrets. Had they scored a hit? Was the U-boat at this moment lying on the seabed, its pressure hull fatally punctured, water pouring in? The crew shuddered when they thought of the deaths awaiting their counterparts on the U-boat. Rats in a trap, most of them. But they deserved it, didn't they? Slinking around, killing without warning.

All this aside, the great disappointment is the cursory treatment given to Newfoundland and Labrador. The strategic and political role of the country is largely ignored. A quick perusal of the index reveals not a single reference to St. John's, Wabana, Gander, Torbay, Stephenville, Goose Bay or Bell Island. Even Newfoundland is missing from the index. The first reference to the country comes on page 125, and thereafter is mentioned when necessary, but without any attempt to provide a proper context. The presence of foreign armed forces on its territory is simply taken as a given. For example, on page 144 there is a mention of American aircraft based in Argentia, and USAAF aircraft in Gander, but no explanation of how, when, or why they got there. Even Canada is accorded less than its due. The development of Eastern Air Command is dispensed with in a single page (22) sandwiched between descriptions of the first U-boat sinking on 14 September 1939 and Gunther Prien's foray into Scapa Flow in October. The Battle of the St. Lawrence is dismissed in less than three pages (164-66).

Though this is an attractive book, the index is very unhelpful and, surprisingly, there is not a single map anywhere to be found. Overall, it is not worth adding to your library. If you have one or more of the books mentioned above, this book would be superfluous, and if you don't, this is not the book to fill the gap in the collection.

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A Settlement of Memory. A Novel. Gordon Rodgers. St. John's, Killick Press, Creative Publishers, 244 p., softcover with French flaps, \$15.95, 1999, ISBN 1-89294-05-X.

JAMES K. HILLER

THIS NOVEL is based on the life and times of William Ford Coaker, the populist leader of the Fishermen's Protective Union, and one of the most important yet misunderstood figures in twentieth-century Newfoundland history. But this is not another *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Unlike Wayne Johnston, who quite openly appropriated and reinvented Joseph R. Smallwood, Gordon Rodgers distances himself from his subject. His Coaker is named Tom Vincent, and is unlike the original in some important ways.

Coaker was a teetotaler with homosexual tendencies; Vincent likes drink and women. Coaker faded from the political scene during the 1920s, as much by his own volition as by the machinations of his enemies; Vincent is assassinated by a deranged constituent, the occasion unintentionally engineered by his nemesis, Prime Minister Claude Caines. Rodgers does not attempt to introduce any "real" historical figures either, though Caines may be based on Sir Richard Squires, and the journalist Hammond Janes on the young Smallwood. This is essentially an imagined story taking place during a defined period in Newfoundland's past — a traditional historical novel, in fact. Rodgers does not seem to have made any deliberate attempts to alter the larger historical context, though in these post-modern times, it is difficult to be certain about such things.

Born in St. John's, orphaned, and with little formal education, Vincent becomes manager of a store at Reach Run Island in his mid-teens, where he experiences an improbable sexual liaison with "Elizabeth." He leaves the merchant business in disgust and becomes a telegrapher. Back at Reach Run, news of the 1892 St. John's fire delivers him from his past. He is baptized by total immersion, and works as a pioneer farmer for 15 years. He becomes a healer, meets George Gill, his faithful future lieutenant, tries his hand at fishing, and then decides to found the Fishermen's Collective. As with Coaker, this takes place at Herring Neck.