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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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Canadian War Museum

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The Canadian War Museum, the national military history museum, is a living memorial to those men and women who served in Canada's armed forces. It is also a centre for research and dissemination of information and expertise on all aspects of the country's military past from pre-contact era to the present. It preserves the artifacts of Canadian military experience, interprets them for present and future generations, and advances the professional study of Canadian military history, including the effects of war and conflict on the nation and all its citizens.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies

The purpose of the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) is to foster research, teaching, and public discussion of military and strategic issues of national and international significance. The Centre is intentionally multi-disciplinary: it has strong commitments in military history, with emphasis on the Canadian experience, and in strategic and operational studies, with emphasis on disarmament. LCMSDS supports both basic and applied research as well as teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the extensive program of LCMSDS workshops, conferences, public lectures, and publications encourages informed discussion of international security and of Canada's national interests in military and strategic issues - past, present and future.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies was founded in 1991 as a Research Centre affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. Its primary support has come from the Department of National Defence and from Wilfrid Laurier University. The Director of the Centre is Dr. Marc Kilgour, Professor of Mathematics, and the Co-Director is Professor Terry Copp, Professor of History.

From the Editor

This issue of *Canadian Military History* goes to press as our American neighbours, still in a state of shock from the events of September 11th, pause to commemorate the 60th anniversary of that other surprise attack - Pearl Harbor. Canadians, even those who have successfully avoided seeing the new movie version of the day "that will live in infamy," will be exposed to detailed coverage of the American story and as usual will learn little about Canada's role in the drama that unfolded in December 1941 at Hong Kong.

This neglect is partly due to the place we have created in our collective memory for those killed in the battle and those who endured the agonies of life in Japanese prisoner of war camps. Their sacrifice embarrasses us because, we are told, they fought in a hopeless cause and should not have been there in the first place. Our government's failure to properly address pension and other issues until most of the survivors were dead is a further source of unease so perhaps the whole story is best forgotten?

But what if there were good reasons for sending "C" Force to Hong Kong, reasons which are comparable to those which resulted in the dispatch of Canadian troops to East Timor or Bosnia or Afghanistan? What if we free ourselves from the distorting lens of hindsight and try and understand the thinking of those who made the decision to place Canadian troops in harm's way in 1941?

The cabinet sought the advice of the army before giving final approval and Major-General Harry Crerar - the chief of the general staff - did not hesitate. "Whatever the military risks," Crerar wrote, "the enterprise needed to be examined from the broad view..." Crerar recommended Canada send a force of two battalions, the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers.

The Royal Rifles of Canada was one of the oldest regiments in the Canadian reserves, then known as the Non-Permanent Active Militia.

Based in Quebec City, it was organized as an English-speaking unit, although its ranks eventually contained a significant number of French-speaking Canadians fluent in English. The regiment was ordered to mobilize an active service force as the 1st Battalion of the Royal Rifles of Canada in July 1940. It was quickly brought up to strength, recruiting men from eastern Quebec and northern New Brunswick. After basic training in New Brunswick the battalion was sent to garrison Newfoundland where some further training was carried out. In October 1941 it moved to Valcartier, Que., to prepare for service in a tropical region. Few guessed their destination was Hong Kong.

The Winnipeg Grenadiers was one of the first battalions mobilized at the outbreak of the war. Organized initially as a machine-gun battalion, it was converted to a regular rifle battalion while located in the West Indies in 1940. Garrison duty in Jamaica provided some opportunity for individual and company training but the Grenadiers had no experience with infantry support weapons such as mortars or artillery. The Grenadiers were also understrength and had to absorb a large number of men and 15 new officers in the two weeks before sailing from Vancouver. There has been much controversy over the selection of these units, but in 1941 none of the other battalions still in Canada was much better prepared for combat. Brigadier J.K. Lawson, who commanded C Force, was impressed by what he saw. He reported: "Both units contain excellent material and a number of good instructors."

The fighting cost the Canadians 290 men killed with almost 500 wounded. During the long years of forced labour in prisoner of war camps another 264 died, including four men executed for trying to escape. After the war the 1,418 veterans who returned waged a second struggle for pension rights, compensation and public recognition.

The Canadian government had sent these young men into harm's way for the best of

reasons: The attempt to "defer or deter war." Later generations, with little understanding of the circumstances of 1941, were quick to condemn this decision. It is now time to move beyond the obvious judgment that sending any reinforcements to the Pacific was a mistake and

recognize the purpose as well as the sacrifice involved in the defence of Hong Kong.

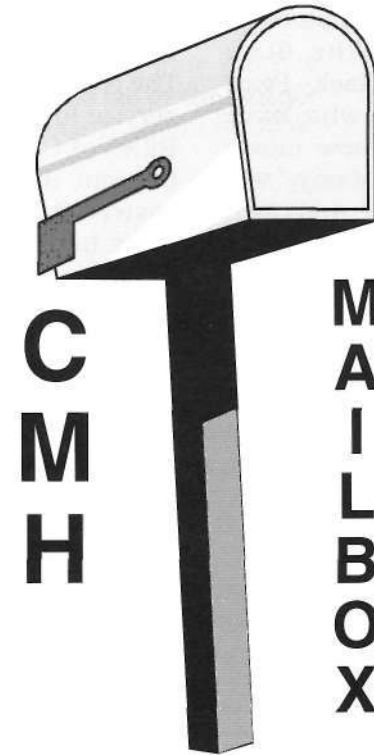
Terry Copp
Wilfrid Laurier University
December 2001

Dear Sir,

Just could not let an issue of *Canadian Military History* (Vol. 10 No.2) go by without at least making a few comments on the articles. "The Other Side of the Hill" by Dan Jenkins was particularly interesting for me on a personal level, as I had worked for a number of years with the 1st Canadian Division Intelligence Company within the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters in Kingston. My job as a Terrain Analyst was to provide a detailed description of the ground within the Division Area Of Operations (AAO) through the G2 to the Division Commander. Naturally, the Terrain Team had work closely with the Meteorological Team as well as the Intelligence Operators in order to get a complete picture of the AAO and all of the factors involved. It was interesting for me to see that the Infantry Division of the Great War was more or less interested in the same sort of things as a Division is today. Weapons systems and the means to collect information have changed in the last 85 years, but the same basic information is required for the Division Commander to plan his operations.

My parent unit, Mapping and Charting Establishment in Ottawa, traces its lineage back through Captain W.R. Flewin and the Canadian Corps Survey Section, so I was very pleased to see mention of this unknown unit in Mr. Jenkins article.

Wes Gustavson's article "Fairly Well Known and Not Need Be Discussed" on Colonel A.F. Duguid and the Canadian Official History of the First World War was another article of particular personal interest to me, as his two volume work was one of my early reference purchases



when I first moved to Ottawa in 1982. Most serious enthusiasts of the Great War and collectors of Canadian militaria search out these publications for two reasons. First of all it is just that the fact that these two books form the first part of an unfinished series of histories dealing with Canada's involvement in the Great War. There has been much 'bar room talk' amount collectors of what could have been, had this series of books been published. Mr. Gustavson's article has certainly laid out the facts about Colonel Duguid, who incidentally is buried in Ottawa's Beachwood Cemetery, and the circumstances surrounding the publication of the first two books.

One thing that Mr. Gustavson does not realise is that those interested in Canadian Army Militaria search out these books, and especially the

volume with the appendices and maps, as we want the militaria! I do agree that to publish an accurate readable history that you have to sift through and categorise the information you are going to present, but Colonel Duguid did the militaria collector a big favour by publishing the price of horses and the number of hand towels ordered for the First Contingent.

There is a growing trend amount the collecting fraternity to not only have the information on the Commanders, campaigns, Corps and Regiments and the people who fought Canada's wars, but now these collectors want the material and industrial history to support their collections. Who made what, how much did it cost and how many were issued is now just as important as who lead what unit to victory capturing which objective. By all means keep giving us the readable accurate histories, but we also want the details on the hardware used in battle.

Sincerely yours,
Ed Storey

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