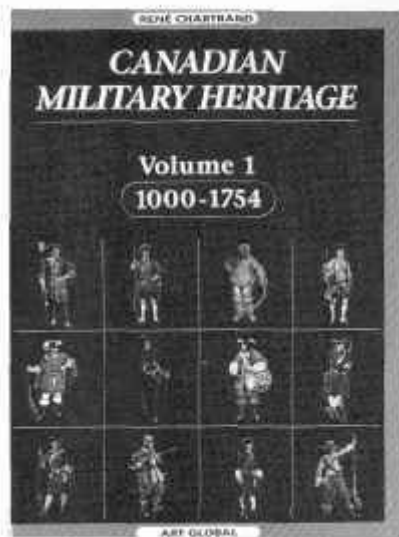


**Canadian Military
Heritage, Volume 1
1000-1754**

René Chartrand. *Canadian Military Heritage, Volume 1-1000-1754*, Montreal: Art Global, 1993, 239 pages.

Apart from establishing Quebec's first major naval training facility in the Vieux Port, Marcel Masse may not have made much military history during his brief career as Minister of National Defence but he took a very



special interest in its presentation. Under Masse, the head of official history at National Defence Headquarters rose to the status of a Director General and his operation was relocated on the organization chart among the military's flacks and spin doctors. While work on the official histories of the RCAF and RCN continued at its traditional languorous pace, "person-years" were diverted to provide the Minister with glossy presentation volumes on Vimy and Dieppe. Specifically, Masse commanded his official historians to broaden their mandate. Instead of scholarly studies of wars and operations in this century, the Director General would extend its interest to the whole of our history. René Chartrand's splendid-looking volume is the first fruit of Masse's policy.

There is much to be said for Masse's policy. With Canada's last major war close to half a century away, tactical lessons to guide Canada's sailors, soldiers and pilots in any future conflict are more likely to be misleading than helpful. French Canada's identification with their country's military institutions is both recent and fragile. Whether it serves

federalists or separatists, an honest, if mildly celebratory study, of the institutions of New France is a legitimate contribution to Canada's history. A staunch federalist in contrast to his patron, and a uniformologist justly revered by the knowledgeable, notably in France, Chartrand has brought a lifetime of enthusiastic scholarship to this book. The text may not surprise the handful of professionals who have studied the eighteenth century French army or its colonial offshoots, the *troupes de la marine* (TDLM); however, the book is not intended to please experts but to attract and inform a much broader mass of Canadians.

Readers will be drawn into the book by its splendid illustrations, most of the best of them by Michel Petard or Francis Back. Just about every known painting or engraving that bears on the military history of the period appears somewhere. If a few of them are repeated several times, blame an excess of zeal on the part of the designers. Even with all the resources of Parks Canada, the National Archives in Quebec, the Anne S.K. Brown Collection in Providence, Rhode Island, and just about every other imaginable collection, putting colour on almost every page without repetition proved impossible.

From the text, readers will learn that soldiers were essential to the survival and growth of New France, from the handful of arquebusiers who escorted Jacques Cartier through Donnacona's villages to the drafts of weekly recruits who filled out the ranks of the *compagnies franches de la marine* and provided the colony with supplementary labour and a considerable number of its permanent

settlers. Earning only 15 livres pay per year — equivalent to perhaps 15 dollars now — private soldiers found that civilian labour was hardly a matter of choice. While common soldiers were recruited in France and often returned there at the end of their service, many stayed and their army nicknames — Blondin (Blondie), Léveillé (Lively) and perhaps even Bouchard (Mouthy) are among the common surnames of modern French Canada.

Unlike their men, the officers of the TDLM came increasingly from the colony's seigneurial class. In turn, they exercised unceasing pressure to maintain and expand vacancies as officers and cadets for their sons. Historians have differed about the results. Was too much of the leadership and talent of the little colony squandered in the oversized officer corps of the garrison? Did those officers, in their greed for wealth, carry New France dangerously beyond its natural limits until conflict with the English colonies became inevitable and hopeless? Or was the officers' local knowledge, zeal for military advancement and openness to unconventional Amerindian tactics, New France's vital edge in the long struggle with the Iroquois and then the English in America? Whatever the arguments, the denouement of New France was postponed to a second volume covering the British era and again, one hopes, authored and compiled by Chartrand.

Uniformology has its limits. It is easy to gain the impression that soldiers were usually neatly attired in their regulation coats, breeches, stockings and tricorne hats. This is probably misleading. Anyone who has lived, slept and eaten in the same suit of

clothes for even a month will understand how eighteenth century soldiers could be in rags by the end of a campaigning season in the North American wilderness. Only very occasionally, on p. 194 for example, Francis Back has portrayed a gaunt, weary, unshaven militiaman in ragged capot and red leggings. For once I had a sense of day-to-day reality.

Critics will also complain that war in Canada did not begin, as does Chartrand's book, with a short chapter on the Vikings and their *skraeling* adversaries. As usual in most survey histories of Canada, many centuries of pre-contact native life have been ignored. The reasons are familiar. The splendid military fashion plates that decorate each chapter would have been hard to create and even harder to authenticate if their subjects had been Crée, Algonquin and Micmac warriors in centuries before the European invasions. One of the few native figures, a portly, full-bearded Inuit leaning on his bow, provides a signature picture for the first chapter. It was borrowed from a 1577 English engraving and certainly not drawn from life. However, visible evidence of aboriginal warfare — broken bones, penetrated skulls and fragmented weapons — exists and could have illustrated that Canada's First Nations did not live in peace and harmony before Europeans landed in their northern Eden.

In its philosophical balance as in its allocation of pages, volume 1 of *Canadian Military Heritage* reflects its Quebecois provenance and target readership. From the table of contents, stationed discreetly at the back, to long sentences that probably sounded better in French than

they do in English, this is not a book that began life in Toronto. Any slight problem is more than outweighed by the obvious commitment to create a beautiful and memorable book. If that was Masse's goal, René Chartrand and Art Global have done him proud.

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