

lived between one archive and another, particularly between one conference and the next, spinning theories further and further detached from whatever it was that went on at Neuvill-St. Vaast, Goose Green, Kuwait City ... Reputations are won—rarely lost—on the issue of Clausewitz's debt to Kant, or 'chaos theory and command'... Like the "eight-legged" essay of the Chinese mandarin examination, for which the highest marks were given to those candidates who most often alluded to the question without doing anything as indelicate as attempting an answer, military history *à la mode* is written through analogy, subtexts and alternative readings.

The Generals
The Canadian Army's
Senior Commanders in the
Second World War

J.L. Granatstein. *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1993, 370 pages, \$35.00.

In ending his review of *Between Mutiny and Obedience* (*Times Literary Supplement*, 13 May 1994) makes an unfortunately valid point about much recent military historiography when he writes that the new sort of historian "can bear the gaze of fact only if it is veiled in a gauze of abstract ideas, woven from the busy looms of social science and political theory." He goes on to discuss whole wacademic lives being successfully

Most of our military historians are free of Keegan's charges and this includes Jack Granatstein, even if he is an "academic." In the volume I have been asked to review, a "collective biography" of Canada's Second World War military leadership, the former Sandhurst lecturer, Keegan, would have considerable difficulty finding support for his thesis.

It must be assumed that the general reader with no more than a passing interest in his country's history, military or other, may still believe naively (and in spite of the twisted efforts of manipulative media people with revisionist axes to grind) that the men who led the men in '39-'45 wore the mantle of heroic leadership with appropriate modesty grounded in the firm conviction of the lightness of the cause coupled with the ability to lead with both inspiration and competence.

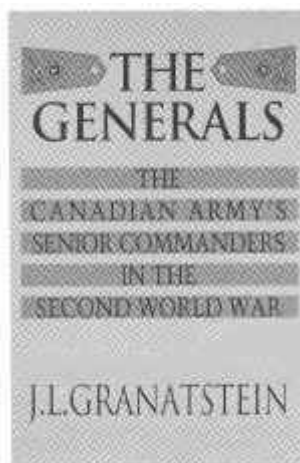
Granatstein, near the very beginning, reminds his readers by quoting Churchill that it "isn't only the good boys who help to win wars; it is the sneaks and stinkers as well."

At the close of the opening paragraph to his "Conclusion," Granatstein states ". . .no one should attempt to hide the brutal fact that Canadian soldiers probably died from the effects of interwar neglect on their commanders and staffs." The word "probably" is much too tentative. Moreover, the prewar neglect combined with wartime pettiness, ambition, incompetence, and intransigence sealed the fate of many more whose only choice was to obey. What precedes should not be construed as a blanket condemnation by Granatstein or this reviewer of Canada's generals. There were, because they were human, sneaks and stinkers among them and their presence resulted in delaying, if not preventing victory. But, mercifully, there were others whose natural leadership qualities gained for them the respect both of the men they commanded and of the enemies they faced. Unfortunately none of these reached the pinnacle of the army's hierarchy. And lest we all be accused of national breast-beating, it should be borne in mind that very few of any of the combatant nations were blessed with the likes of a Slim, a Juin, an O'Connor (before his capture) or a Manstein.

Unlike some of his colleagues, Granatstein is never mean-spirited nor is he even disdainful of his subjects although some, by their actions, were beneath anyone's contempt. He tries to avoid gossip and generally succeeds. Since his is a socio-political approach to leadership, his almost total avoidance of operations leads him to certain conclusions as to the

efficacy of field commanders that are open to serious challenge. Objectivity, that ever elusive goal of all historians, is as attainable in Granatstein's mind as it can possibly be and he strives for it at all times.

His highly effective use of source materials and his sharp eye for the human element allow him to expose the sometimes comic, sometimes tragic dimensions in the lives of his characters. When Andy McNaughton, the brilliant, anachronistic champion of the Canadian soldier, learns of his dismissal, he says to his companion, "I hope there won't be a mutiny in the army." In fact, there was "scarcely a ripple." True pathos.



Granatstein's eye for the relevant also helps. In his discussion of the ups and downs of "Tommy" Burns' career, we see the man as three dimensional. We are also privy to his brilliance although this would never suffice either to obtain or maintain the loyalty and devotion of his subordinates in the field, especially the outstanding militiaman, Hoffmeister or the gruff, hard-nosed Vokes. But it is difficult to imagine a more precise assessment of the ideal soldier than this Burns definition: "... a primitive, honest fellow, uncomplicated by elaborate

thought-machinery or superfluous ideas. He makes a simple and reliable tool which . . . will not get out of order at critical moments or commence to function erratically."

The egghead Burns shot himself in the foot once too often because of severe personality problems and these, along with his sexual escapades and other indiscretions, proved his undoing. Granatstein alludes to these without dwelling on them in any sensational fashion. He also refers to Vokes as a womanizer and Keller's sexual peccadilloes. But when it comes to Guy Simonds, perhaps because of a blind spot caused by enthusiastic admiration, the author makes no mention of Simonds' affair with Mona Anderson nor the nastiness of his divorce from "K" Lockhart and his subsequent marriage to Dorothy. This is not a plea for titillation but for equal treatment.

An argument could be made for a lapse in authorial objectivity in the case of the section on Simonds. Earlier, Granatstein's fair-mindedness prevented him from judging Crerar as harshly as he perhaps should have been, given the evidence of his paranoia and hunger for power. But in the chapter dealing with Simonds, the latter's attachment to the cruel, arrogant and egotistical Montgomery makes him out to be a chip off the old Monty block. This also seems to fit into the obsequious colonial's mould vis-à-vis the imperial master. Earlier, Granatstein did not fail to make the point of British arrogance concerning the Canadians especially on the part of Oliver Leese and in the treatment accorded Burns, Crerar and, earlier, McNaughton. But in the Simonds section, Granatstein even uses the same chapter heading ("Master of the Battlefield")

as Nigel Hamilton used for the title of the second volume of his Montgomery biography.

Simonds, according to Granatstein, was "the best soldier Canada has produced in the Second World War." Such a strong categorical statement has been assailed in some quarters among Canadian historians. The general consensus seems to be that although that may be true, it also left much to be desired. There is no mention of Simonds' role in the closing stages of the war in the Rhineland. In fighting that was reminiscent of Flanders, the two-pronged attack was delayed until the start of February so that armoured mobility was lost in the mud while air support was reduced by cloud and poor visibility. Startling mistakes were made by usually reliable commanders. Some contend that Simonds allowed his rivalry with the popular Horrocks to lead him into murderous and needless fighting. The point is moot to this day.

My allotted space does not allow me to do justice to this very worthwhile book. There are lapses as has been pointed out. Some generals receive treatment that is cursory at best (Foulkes, Kitching, Worthington) while others whose careers were spectacular and successful (Holly Keebler) leave the reader like Oliver Twist asking for "More please, sir!"

The section of the political generals, particularly Maurice Pope, are thought-provoking and disturbingly prophetic. Pope's remarkable loyalty and clear-headedness deserve to be better known. This dovetails nicely into Granatstein's candid and well-balanced treatment of the absence of French-Canadian generals. His interpretation of Ken Stuart's role in this situation is debatable as was his involvement in

the manpower shortage crisis. It is revealing to read Crerar's opinion of General La Flèche as being "entirely unmoral... very dangerous ... an utter egomaniac." In the light of what has been revealed about Crerar himself, this is a clear case of "the pot calling the kettle black."

Granatstein concludes that Canada's "share of victory owed more to the common soldiers than to the generals." Nevertheless, victory could not have been achieved without the generals who because of their "psychological colonial status" were "condemned to practise deference to their betters and control in the presence of subordinates."

Specialists may and will quibble with Granatstein on some or many points but most will be satisfied, even impressed, generally.

Gil Drolet