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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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Agreement No.1372300; Publication mail registration No.08978

Canadian Military History is published four times a year in the winter, spring, summer and fall by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University.

Editor-in-Chief	Terry Copp
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Printed in Canada by Beacon Herald Fine
Printing Division, Stratford, Ontario

ISSN 1195-8472

Subscription Information

Canada:

One year (4 issues)	\$32.00
Two years (8 issues)	\$64.00

International:

One year (4 issues)	US\$27.00
Two years (8 issues)	US\$54.00

Visa & Mastercard accepted.

Please make cheques and
money orders payable to
"Wilfrid Laurier University."

To renew by phone call:
(519) 742-7336

Canadian War Museum

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The mission statement of the Canadian War Museum is: "To share in the remembrance of, and serve as a memorial to those Canadians lost in, or as a result of war; to examine the war and war related history of Canada and its effects upon Canada and Canadians; and to document Canada's commitment to peacekeeping and the maintenance of international security." To this end the CWM maintains an exhibition facility with three floors of galleries, and a collections building housing close to half a million artifacts.

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

Until very recently - and in some circles perhaps even now - there was a strongly-held view that Charles Stacey had said all that needed saying about the Canadian army's experience in the Second World War. Clearly, Stacey's official history volumes remain the best of any for Allied armies in the Second World War, but few now would argue that Stacey provides the final word.

Indeed, the articles in this issue by Rickard and Wilson follow a trend which has developed strongly in the last ten years - and which often forms the core of *CMH* - of wrestling with the extremely interesting and difficult problems of personalities, doctrine and tactics that lay outside Stacey's mandate. Rickard's work reminds us that we remain only dimly aware of the complex interpersonal relationships that shaped much of what went on, and of the fruits which can be plucked from the sources now open to historians. Wilson's article on the doctrine of army tank brigades contributes to the on-going debate over the conduct of operations in Normandy. In doing so he pushes the discussion back into the developmental period in a way which sheds new light on the muddled thinking of the period.

In all these we have only scratched the surface, and much more needs doing. Among the list of Second World War subjects that await serious scholarship is the Canadian

Dear Sir,

Having recently read the article on the 24th Field Ambulance in your winter edition I would like to thank Mr. Russell for his excellent account of the unit's activities.

I was a medical officer with the 24th throughout the Italian Campaign and can attest to the accuracy of his report. His description of so many individual actions reveal that a good deal of time was spent researching material and interviewing former members of the unit.

artillery story. George Blackburn's books merely whet the appetite for more on what the guns were doing. More importantly, anyone trying to work out the basics of Canadian operations on the ground is confronted by the dearth of good gunnery material in the secondary sources. All we usually know is that the shells did or did not land where the infantry needed them, when they needed them. What was happening in the gun positions - even where the gun positions were - and how the doctrine was evolving remain largely unexplored in the modern literature.

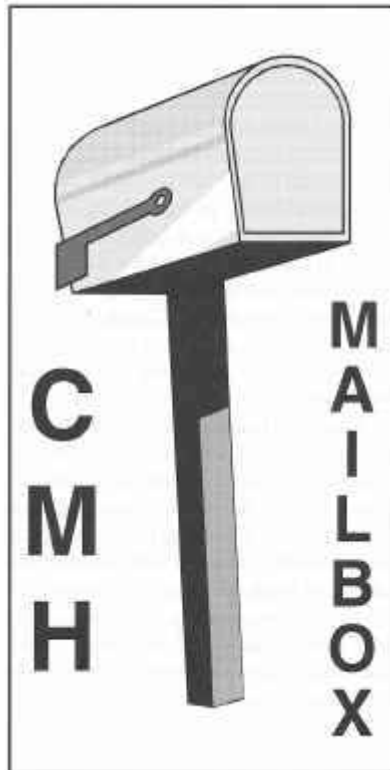
The same requirement for modern scholarship holds true for Canadian army operations in the First World War. Nicholson's history, as engaging as it is, remains but a shadow of the complex and fascinating story of the CEF and the Canadian Corps. Indeed, most nations published multi-volume histories of the Great War: the Canadian Corps got one. Syd Wyse's delightful account of the "Gardeners of Vimy" begs any number of questions about the Canadian role in the great German offensives of 1918, questions which the existing literature also cannot answer.

And so, despite the efforts of gifted official historians, Canada's army experience in the two world wars still requires work, and there remains much to reward diligent historians. If you've been hesitating, its time to join the fray!

The 24th was a very fine unit, well-trained and ingenious, able to cope with whatever problems they encountered. Treating and evacuating wounded in Italy was often difficult. Makeshift accommodations, poor roads and the ever-present danger of shelling, landmines and booby traps presented real challenges.

In closing I thank Mr. Russell once again for a job well done. Very often the contributions of the Medical Services are overlooked.

Sincerely,
T.A. Gander
Edmonton, AB



Dear Sir,

The Spring 1999 issue of *Canadian Military History* includes a fine article by Atholl Sutherland Brown titled, "Forgotten Squared: Canadian Aircrew in Southeast Asia, 1942-1945." Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific theatres have generally been neglected by Canadian historians.

However, there is one mistake in CMH on page 68, which should receive correction. This same mistake appears in the W.R. Chorley book on *Bomber Command Losses*. The book by Les Allison and Harry Hayward is titled *They Shall Grow Not Old*. The word "Not" has been transposed so that it precedes "Grow." It is unlikely that the mistake was made by Brown, since he would have had the book in front of him; did the editor change it?

The title comes from *Poems for the Fallen* by Laurence Binyon and reads as follows:

They shall grow not old, as we that
are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the
years condemn them,
At the going down of the sun and
in the morning
We will remember them.

The poem is reprinted in Oliver Lindsay's *At the going down of the sun: Hong Kong and South/East Asia 1941-45* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981). You will note that Lindsay's title comes from the same poem.

Yours truly,
Marjorie Wong
London, ON

Sir,

I would like to make a few comments concerning Tim Cook's article "A Proper Slaughter: The March 1917 Gas Raid at Vimy" in the Spring 1999 edition of *Canadian Military History*. The disastrous results of the 4th Canadian Division's raid were certainly bad enough, but the reader must also appreciate the types of chemical weapons in use in 1917 and the way in which the respirators functioned.

Anyone with current military experience will have had some familiarization with chemical and

biological weapons that can be used and the equipment a person must wear to counteract these agents. The C4 Respirator used today by the Canadian Forces forms an air-tight seal with the face, has a face piece that is designed to fit comfortably on the face and head, has a speaker amplifier for voice communication, has an interchangeable activated charcoal filter that can accommodate both right- and left-hand shooters, has a built-in drinking straw for use with the canteen, is designed so that the eye-pieces do not "fog up" when being used and allows for an "air flow" around the face when air is inhaled through the filter. The C4 Respirator when combined with the rest of the NBC Ensemble provides complete protection for the whole body. Even with all of today's modern materials and designs, using the NBC equipment for more than rudimentary "gas hut" training is uncomfortable and cumbersome resulting in the average military job taking much longer than usual to complete.

Even Second World War Canadian/British respirators were well designed for their time. Both the Mk.V (a direct descendant of the Great War Small Box Respirator) and the 1943 Pattern Lightweight Assault Respirator (the "grandfather" of the Canadian C4) had some of the characteristics of modern respirators with face pieces which formed airtight seals with the face, activated charcoal filters, speaker amplifiers and, in the case of the Lightweight Assault Respirator, interchangeable filters. An oilskin anti-gas cape with hood, gloves and boots provided the rest of the protection for the body.

Functioning in a military environment with this equipment on was again a problem. Thankfully, the Axis powers never resorted to chemical warfare during the Second World War.

During the Great War, chemical weapons were *new* and the gas of choice was either chlorine, bromine or phosgene. All are choking agents which attack the respiratory system and usually cause death when the lungs fill with mucus to counteract the gas. Mustard Gas, a blister agent, was used from 1917 onwards. This gas would blister exposed skin, cause blindness and also burn the respiratory system if inhaled.

To counteract the early choking gases, it was found that by urinating on a cloth or handkerchief, stuffing it in your mouth and breathing through this, there was a reasonable chance of surviving the gas attack and defending one's trench. Plain water on a cloth was found to work, although not as well.

Shortly after the initial gas attack at Ypres in 1915, the British were searching for a suitable mask to counteract gas. The Germans actually had the lead on Gas Masks and by capturing several different examples, the British were able to develop their own model for issue to the troops. Early examples of gas protection were cotton facepiece respirators which when soaked in a solution of sodium hyposulphate (a chemical used for fixing photographs) and sodium carbonate (washing soda), was found to provide reasonable protection against gas. The problem was that these masks had to be constantly dampened with this salt solution in order to be effective. There are some reported cases of excited troops applying too much solution to these facepiece respirators and not being able to breathe because they were too damp.

From the facepiece masks there was a progression to flannel "smoke helmets" which completely covered the head and used thin sheets of mica as the eyepiece. The idea was that these dampened helmets proved protection to the complete head and

The editors of *Canadian Military History* wish to thank the following people and organizations for their contributions to this issue:

Serge Bernier, René Chartrand, Robert Cotey, Christopher Evans, Mike Evans, Elizabeth Millar, Ian Miller, Natalie Osterberg, Steve Osterberg, Laurie Peloquin, Jade Robinson-Leduc, Kirsten Sheffield, Scott Sheffield, Diane Tomas and Michael Whitby.

Canadian Forces Photographic Unit; Canadian War Museum; Directorate of History & Heritage; Department of National Defence; Security and Defence Forum; Department of National Defence; National Archives of Canada; Wilfrid Laurier University



These two photographs shows a German Gas Mask that was captured in mid-1915 by the Canadians. The photograph on the left show it worn with the face mask while the photo in the centre show it with the face mask removed. Note that the wearer had to breath through his mouth and there were clips to close the nose. This German mask was much more practical than the British version, yet it still would have been uncomfortable to wear for long periods of time.

This photograph shows the Canadian C3 Respirator when it was introduced in the early 1960s. The C3 was used by the Canadian military until the early 1990s and is similar to the C4.

face. The dampened flannel was the filter and the user had to exhale by blowing through a one-way rubber valve. The "smoke helmet" evolved into the PH Hood, which was effective against phosgene gas, and this is illustrated in the top right-hand photograph on page 15 of the last edition. The PH Hood was carried in a small cotton bag on the right side of the soldier so that he could access the hood during a gas attack. "One size fits all" when it came to manufacturing these facepiece respirators and the hoods.

The Small Box respirator was issued beginning in 1916, and its facepiece design was based on examples of German Respirators that had been captured in the field or found on prisoners. The Small Box Respirator consisted of a metal box, which held activated charcoal and was the filtering agent for the known chemical weapons. From the filter, a rubber tube ran into a rubberized facepiece. This facepiece, when tightened, could achieve a minimal airtight seal and the facepieces came in three sizes to generally fit most people. Located between the eyepieces was what could be considered a large metal clip with cotton swab ends. Since an airtight seal was not possible with this respirator, the wearer had to clamp the nose shut with the metal clip, bite down on the end of the hose

that was in the facepiece; and breath through the mouth! Imagine how uncomfortable this was to wear just standing, now attempt to cross no-man's-land under fire and you really gain a respect for the men of the CEF who had to wear these in combat.

The Small Box respirator was carried in a large cotton bag that was worn on the chest. To wear the respirator, only the mask is removed and the filter box stays in the carrier. In effect, the carrier provided an additional layer of filtration against the gas prior to it entering the filter box.

It was very common to carry two respirators, the Small Box respirator and a PH Hood as a back-up. This can be seen on the top left-hand photograph on page 15 where one man is adjusting the respirator of another.

The facepiece of the Small Box Respirator was designed to protect the face, especially the eyes and the respiratory openings, from the effects of gas. Since choking agents were being used, the rest of the body was protected by the uniform and equipment with only the neck, hair and hands being exposed to gas.

By actually knowing how the British/Canadian Great War respirators were designed and how they functioned, the reader can gain more insight as to what it was like to

wear a respirator in a chemical environment during the Great War.

One other piece of information, Brigadier-General Victor Odium commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade is seen holding a German 9mm MP 18 Submachine Gun in the photograph on page 19, not a rifle. This was the world's first true submachine gun and is another story in itself.

Sincerely yours,
Ed Storey,
Nepean, Ontario

Dear Sir,

The article "Forgotten Squared: Canadian Aircrew in Southeast Asia, 1942-1945" by Atholl Sutherland Brown in the Spring 1999 issue of *Canadian Military History* raises a number of points that deserve some consideration.

- (a) The War in the Far East has not been fairly covered by historians at large.
- (b) The participation of Canadian Air Force men in the Far East has not been touched by any Canadian historians except for Tom Melnyk's book which was based on his research for the

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official history of the RCAF but was largely forgotten in that history.

(c) The participation of RCAF aircrew and ground crews (principally Radar Techs) on other than RCAF squadrons has not been recognized in any way.

(d) There is a dearth of primary source information on which to base the development of a history of the RCAF members who served on other than RCAF units.

(e) The RCAF was delinquent in keeping track of the RCAF members and more latterly not attempting to find out who they were and what they had done.

The first four of these points are valid and will be discussed later. The fifth point is not valid insofar as the Far East is concerned. Melnyk in his book includes a note on sources which in part states, "One of the single most valuable sources for the history of Canadian airmen in the RAF in South East Asia is a listing of RCAF aircrew serving in RAF squadrons which was compiled by the RCAF District HQ India and South East Asia and is now held in the Directorate of History [now the Directorate of History and Heritage]. This listing provides statistical data, a means of connecting individuals to events and a check on the accuracy of press clippings, personal files and other official sources."

This listing includes the number, name and rank of each individual grouped together by squadron showing the month of arrival on squadron, the date of terminating service from the squadron and whether the individual was posted, wounded, POW, or a fatality.

The record starts on the 1 January 1942 and finishes in August 1945. Statistics by squadron, by type of service e.g. Fighter, Bomber etc. or type of aircraft are easily calculated by month, for example there were 46 Canadians serving on non-RCAF squadrons on 1 January 1942 and 507 in January 1945, 359 of which were with Liberator Squadrons.

It is puzzling why Mr. Sutherland Brown did not try to develop this source until one reads note 12 of his article. Apparently Mr. Sutherland Brown had written to the Directorate

of History to ask for such a list. To which he received the following in part reply from Dr. S.J. Harris. "You will not find here or anywhere for that matter a comprehensive list of Canadians serving on other than RCAF squadrons throughout the war, in South East Asia or else where because the files aren't kept that way."

It would perhaps be unfair to make judgments on the basis of this statement, taken out of context, but one is forced to wonder if either gentleman did his homework. The records were kept and are held by the Directorate of History. I have a copy which originated in the Directorate.

Returning to the first four points and focussing directly on the last three, it is probably fair to examine the Directorate of History's mandate since it is the organization viewed as having the responsibility to collect and maintain the history of the RCAF in its totality. Most readers of history are aware that the Directorate does produce certain histories under its own collective authorship, other histories are written by members of this staff and published not as official histories but for public consumption (e.g. *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*) and still others are written by members of the staff who write books on their own time and securing financial backing and a publisher in the same way as any other writer (e.g. *Ocean Bridge* by Carl Christie).

But what else is done by the Directorate? The position given by members of the Directorate is, "We do not gather and store historical information on a random basis, the information held by us is the material obtained to support the work published in our histories and certain other historical books that we have obtained or are available to us from the DND Library."

One can argue that the Directorate may or should have been given a different mandate, perhaps to research and gather historical information before it is lost and then hire independent, knowledgeable authors as is done in the United Kingdom. Any such argument is academic, the Directorate has been cut to the bare bone and does not have the capability to do little more than service requests as well as they can via a reading room and correspondence with those seeking

information. Unfortunately not always with good results.

What can be done about it? Don't expect miracles. The government is not going to allocate more resources to the Directorate of History. It would seem that the best course of action would be to take the current resources from the various government history departments, Archives, War Museum, Aviation Museum and develop a plan to complete the overall Canadian Military History under the aegis of one authority or a joint steering Committee. That is a long term goal which may or may not be achieved. There are indications that something like this is currently underway.

Perhaps the time has come for we the long suffering "forgotten majority" to make our own contribution. By the time a long term coordinated strategy is developed most of us will be gone. In the meantime Squadron, Group or Command Associations could organize to get on with the job themselves preferably with the support of a government organization. That excellent book by Sam Kostenuk and John Griffiths *RCAF Squadrons* is an example of this type of effort where the War Museum supported them financially to a limited extent but more importantly conveyed some trust and visible authority to the authors in their dealings with libraries and resource centres.

To get out and do something is a more worthwhile pastime than complaining. Before anything can be done, a data base of Canadians on non-Canadian Squadrons will be required. There are two approaches to gathering the necessary information. The first is to go through all the operational record books and identify all the Canadian aircrew and their operational experiences. Mr. Sutherland Brown has identified the major flaw in this approach. The nationalities of all the aircrew are not always identified. Second but not least the ground crews who served on RAF squadrons, primarily the ubiquitous radar techs would not be identified.

A second and probably more profitable approach would be to sort the 225,000 files and identify all the personnel who went overseas, 40 to

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50 thousand is one estimate. They then could be categorized into "Order of Battle" or data base of RCAF personnel who served on other than RCAF units. This data base would then provide the logical basis for developing the complete history of the RCAF in combination with the other necessary documents such as Operational Record Books, War Graves, Honours and awards, battle claims, biographies, press releases or whatever is required, to tell the stories that pique the interest of historians, amateur, professional or students. This task would not be as great as it first appears, very cursory screening would eliminate those people who did not go overseas and

their files sent back to the archives. The information concerning them is already available in unit histories.

The remaining files would then be examined to determine who served in other than RCAF units. These files would be listed by unit and dates of service to form an RCAF "Order of Battle" a data base including date of arrival, date of departure, occupation, honours and awards, injuries, POW or missing, or fatality. In the case of the Far East Squadrons such a data base is already available. There is nothing preventing an interested group or individual from procuring an operational record book of a squadron or squadrons on which to build a squadron history of the Canadians on the Squadron(s).

Mr. Peter Brennan, a former "kicker" on 435 Squadron and "compiler extraordinary" of Canadian Aviation history, particularly of service in the Far East, who assisted Captain Melnyk in the preparation of his book, has developed an outstanding library and extensive range of contacts, and is arguably "the" expert on RCAF history in the Far East. It would behoove any author wishing to write on RCAF affairs in the Far East to check with Mr. Brennan as to information available and where to look for it. A cheerful obliging gentleman, he is ever helpful.

Sincerely,
Bob Gurney