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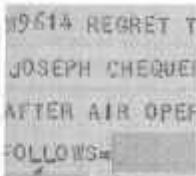


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# CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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## Canadian War Museum

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**T**he 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.

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**T**he 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

Many years ago, I had a neighbour who was a high school history teacher. She once asked me what sort of history I did and when I replied that I called myself a military historian, she grimaced. "I never teach war stuff to my students," she said. "It's not good for them to hear about those things." When I asked how she could possibly teach history without mentioning the world wars, she merely added that she wasn't interested in "war stuff and didn't think her students needed to know it either.

Historians have long feared that attitudes like this were endemic among teachers. Surveys and questionnaires consistently reveal that Canadians know little of their country's military heritage, and the blame for that ignorance is invariably placed at the doorstep of Canada's public school system. It was argued that a whole generation of teachers, raised or trained in the Vietnam era, tended to react viscerally to any mention of past wars. Their best way to prevent such folly from occurring again, they assumed, was to ensure that the next generation of youngsters was taught nothing about war. The result of this thinking was that countless Canadians were completely unfamiliar with some of the most important events in the nation's history.

Until quite recently, I too lamented the ignorance of Canada's military history that seemed to plague so many young people. That is, until I realized that I had confused a lack of knowledge with a lack of interest. As I become more involved in the public school system, I meet more and more students, teenagers and younger, who have a deep interest in Canadian history generally, and military history in particular.

In November 1999, I had the good fortune to be involved in the Remembrance Day service at Lord Roberts Public School (established in 1916 and named for one of the great military heroes of the Victorian era) in central London, Ontario. My own contribution was a slide show of historical images during the wreath-laying, but the highlight was an address by a London man

who had been a teenager in Holland at the end of the Second World War. His talk was very personal and deeply moving, but I was just as impressed by the conduct of the 300-odd students in attendance. Clearly fascinated by the recollections of a childhood very different from their own, they sat in rapt and respectful silence, listening intently as the speaker related how it felt when Canadian troops arrived to free his village from occupation.

What's more, I have come into contact with two tremendously gifted history teachers in south-western Ontario who are kindling in their students a deep appreciation and reverence for Canada's military history.

In September 1998, Jerry Selk, a history teacher at South Secondary School in London (opened in 1928), asked his students to look at the marks on the classroom floor where the old desks had been bolted. He told them to reflect on the fact that those desks were once occupied by students who had volunteered to serve their country in time of war and who had never returned to London. He then led the class to the school's war memorial, and asked each student to select a name. Their assignment for the term was to dig into local history sources and write a biography of each man.

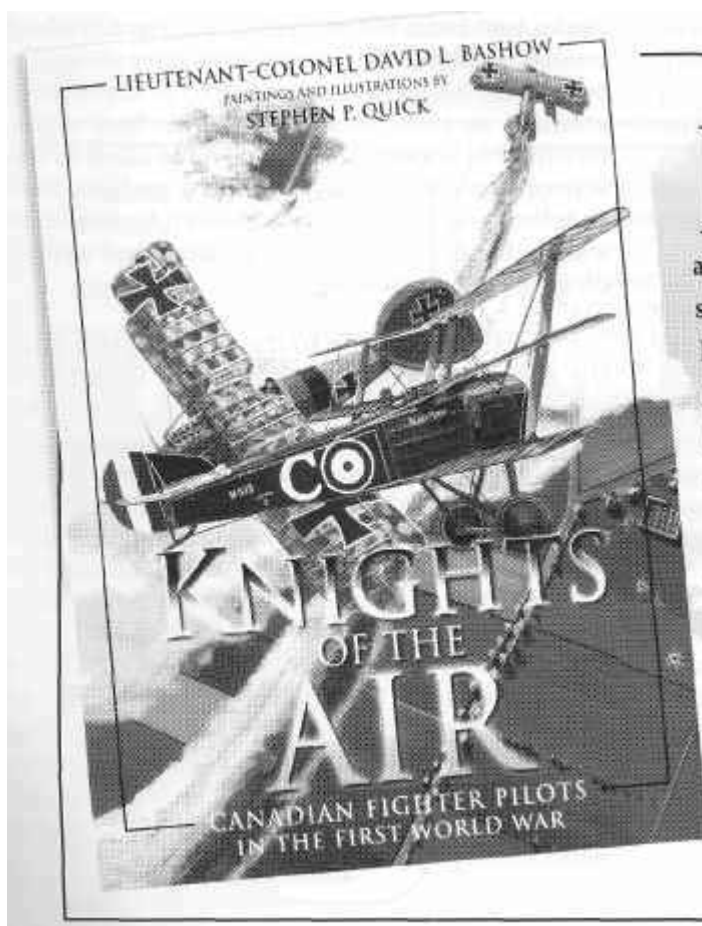
The students took to the work eagerly, and the fruits of their research can be found in a remarkable website <[www.tvdsb.on.ca/south/history/history.html](http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/south/history/history.html)> designed and maintained by successive classes. On it, you will find a growing number of biographies of London's fallen (the project is expanding to include the fallen from other London schools), and it becomes instantly clear that the students have developed deep personal attachments to their subjects. One of the hardest things about teaching military history is to find something in it that the students can relate to. By using students from their own school as windows into the past, Jerry Selk has been able to bridge the gap which so often seems to separate young people from their own history.

Not far away from London, Robin Barker-James, a history teacher at Glendale High School in Tillsonburg, has found an equally effective way to present military history in a way that has impact on teenagers. He owns a farm, and one weekend a year that farm is transformed into a battlefield. One day, his students might re-enact the Dieppe Raid; another day, they may live in a field hospital or a prison camp. And then there are the trenches, where students are asked to imagine what it must have been like waiting to go over the top, or anticipating an enemy trench raid. Obviously, there is only so much that Barker-James can replicate; it's hard to reproduce the smell of poison gas, or the bloated rats, or the stench of unburied corpses. But the exercise stimulates the students' imagination, and encourages them to try to comprehend what it must have been like to live under those conditions. Living in a dry ditch for a weekend is nasty enough, they realize - what must it have been like to live in a stinking, sodden trench for weeks or months? By all accounts, the students take the lesson very seriously. Just like Jerry

Selk's, Barker-James' students come to see military history close up, and to develop the same connection with the past that motivates the best historians.

Selk and Barker-James are just two examples of fine teachers who are deeply committed to ensuring that their students gain an appreciation of their country's history. Doubtless there are many others across Canada who have also found innovative ways to make history come alive. And so, the outlook is nowhere near as bleak as some people may fear. On Remembrance Day, I am often asked by journalists what will happen when the last of Canada's veterans has passed on - will there still be any interest in the country's military heritage? Now, I can answer with confidence that our history is in good hands. There are new generations, ready and eager, to whom the torch of memory can be passed.

Jonathan F. Vance  
University of Western Ontario



**D**uring WWI, more than 13,000 Canadian lads flew with the British flying services, with at least 171 of them becoming ace scout or fighter pilots. Of the 26 Empire aces with 30 or more claims, 10 were Canadian.

*Knights of the Air* captures both the spirit and the magnitude of their war, charting the evolution of air combat from the opening shots until the armistice. Here, in words and paintings, is the definitive salute to those fine young men.



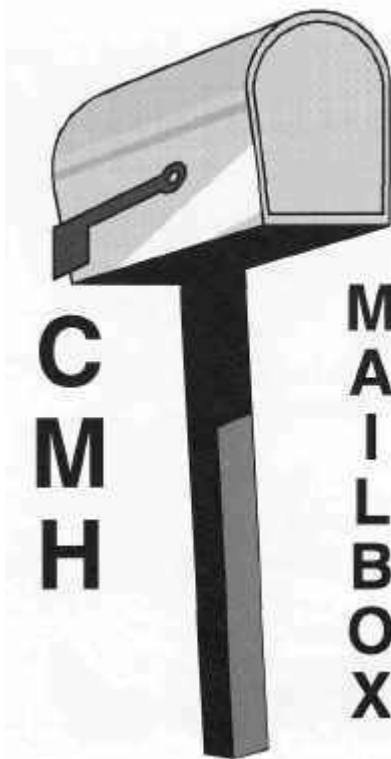
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Dear Sir,

In response to the Book Review Article, *The Great War and Canadian Memory*, I would like to congratulate both the journal for publishing this thought-provoking piece and the author, Professor Robert Martin, for undertaking the difficult job of condensing two and a half decades of historiography. As always in a review essay of limited space, there will be a few quibbles with books that have been left out.

I certainly agree with Martin's interpretation on the importance of recent and controversial works by Jay Winter, Denis Winter and Niall Ferguson. These are indeed worthy books to bring to the attention of Great War historians, but I would suggest that the recent monographs by Ian Brown on logistics, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson on Sir Henry Rawlinson and the difficulties of command on the Western Front, and even the somewhat older works of Tim Travers, Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham should be essential reading for all interested in understanding the difficult fighting conditions and search for a breakthrough on the Western Front.<sup>1</sup> And although there are fewer historians working exclusively on the Canadian Corps, there has, nonetheless, been a recent interest in the topic by several graduate students. Although book reviews tend, as their names suggest, to only look at published works, it is worth mentioning the following studies which have investigated and reappraised the Canadian Corps and the Canadian war effort. At the War Studies programme at the Royal Military College, Lieutenant-Colonel Ian McCullough's examination of the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade explored the evolution of command, control and training at the Brigade level; Shane Shriver's work on the hard-pounding victories of the Canadian Corps in *the Last 100 Days* has provided valuable insight into the Canadian operational way of war; and Tim Cook's analysis of the role of gas warfare breaks new ground in understanding the "gas environment" that all soldiers were forced to endure and fight through on the first and only chemical battlefield in human history. The later two works were also recently published as full-length monographs.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Den



Jenkins recently completed Carleton University PhD on intelligence in the Canadian Corps and Wes Gustavson's University of Calgary MA thesis on Colonel A.F. Duguid and the writing of the Canadian official histories are valuable additions to the historiography and collective memory of the Canadian participation in the Great War.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps after absorbing these new Canadian offerings, Martin would not suggest that *the* Canadian Corps way of war in 1918 "seems to anticipate *blitzkrieg*." It clearly did not and the Canadians were firmly welded to the successful attack doctrine of artillery and infantry support. Neither the deep, very quick, and sharply focused penetrations nor the concerted interaction of armour, air-power, and fast-moving infantry - all characteristics of *blitzkrieg* tactics - were ever successfully accomplished by the Canadian Corps, or any other Entente force for that matter. The Canadian attack doctrine, although vastly evolved and improved from the clumsy offensives two years earlier on the Somme, was still predicated on massive and accurate artillery bombardments of high explosives, shrapnel and poison gas against strong points, forming up areas, lines of communication and enemy artillery

batteries. At the same time, the Canadian infantry were taught to lean into this storm of steel and chemicals, advancing with complicated fire and movement tactics. However, whenever the infantry lost their artillery barrages or were forced to rush their assaults in the hope of catching the enemy off-balance (the very core of *blitzkrieg* tactics), the poor bloody infantry at the sharp end suffered heavy casualties.

Although this is a minor point, it leads me to the main reason for writing this letter. On two occasions in Martin's article, he suggests that "it was the Canadian Corps which defeated the German Army." This is simply not true. Without a doubt, the Canadian Corps was one of or perhaps the finest fighting formation on the Western Front in the last two years of the war. The Canadian Corps' string of operational victories from Vimy Ridge (April 1917), Hill 70 (August 1917), Passchendaele (October-November, 1917), and the Last 100 Days (August-November, 1918), created a fearful reputation among the Germans. One must keep in mind, however, that the Canadian Corps was but four divisions - albeit strong, over-sized, well-equipped, and disciplined - out of more than 80 divisions in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Despite spear-heading attack after attack, the Canadian Corps must be seen as a component, though, again, as a very important one, of the BEF. Moreover, a large portion of logistics for the Canadian Corps was supplied by the Second and First British Armies, to whom the Canadians served under, and without which it would have been impossible to keep advancing during the final months of the war. Additional British artillery support was important, too. Finally, the complementary attacks by the rest of the BEF (as well as French, and to a lesser extent, American forces) up and down the line, meant that the Germans were spread thin, trying to defend everything against the Entente onslaught. The Canadians certainly did more than their share of the fighting - and dying - but they did not single-handedly despatch the Germans back to Berlin. I want to make it clear that the Canadians were

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indeed considered as shock troops by both Douglas Haig and his German counterparts, but implying that we defeated the German armies alone is the type of navel-gazing that simply clouds our understanding of the Canadian role in the Great War. Despite these observations, I think review articles like this one are profitable tools in bringing to light new books and sources while also stimulating debate among military historians.

Tim Cook  
National Archives of Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario

**Notes**

1. Ian Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front* (London, 1998); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson* (Oxford, 1992); Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (London, 1987); Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945* (London, 1982)  
2. See Ian McCulloch, "The 'Fighting Seventh': The Evolution and the Devolution of Tactical Command and Control in a Canadian Infantry Brigade of the Great War," (Royal Military College of Canada: unpublished MA thesis, 1997); Shane

B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Wesport: Praeger, 1997); Tim Cook, *No Place To Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

3. Dan Jenkins, *Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918*, (Carleton: unpublished PhD thesis, 1999) and Wesley C. Gustavson, *Missing the Boat? Colonel A.F. Duguid and the Canadian Official History of World War I*, (University of Calgary, unpublished MA thesis, 1999).