

## **RENEGOTIATING NATIONAL BOUNDARIES: CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORIANS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

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Like other members of the former British Empire, Canadians have been obsessed by their own national conception and birth. From the First World War (the event itself sparked this sea change in Canadian historiography) through the 1930s and 1940s, the bulk of historical literature created was unofficially devoted to somehow locating the actual political and economic coordinates at which Canada threw down her imperial shackles and established her own independent statehood. Canada's participation in the two World Wars of the twentieth century was early on identified by historians as providing the circumstances within which Canada took its place on the international stage – the almost one hundred year old domestic historiographical connection between overseas military engagement and national status has proved to be enduring beyond any sort of usefulness in either encouraging patriotism or producing solid scholarly publications. Nearly every survey text of Canadian history presents some component of military history but invariably does so as an endorsement of the theory that this country's military battles on the European continent were key points in our struggle to reach nationhood. Much current work then continually acts to reestablish this century's international conflicts as periodic wars of independence and imbues these events with a national significance that strictly limits any important changes in the way that that history is studied and written at the professional level. In fact, work that lacks the traditional professional agenda of emphasizing nation-building

rhetoric is ignored at best on the basis that it somehow diminishes Canadian achievement overseas and at worst, on the assumption that it degrades the sacrifices made by enlisted men and women in both those wars. It is not my intention here to argue that Canada did not secure national status via its participation in international wars or even to articulate the merits of either position on that issue but to claim that the by-now firmly entrenched habit of analyzing military history as a means to authenticating Canada's conversion in status from colony to nation has distorted Canada's military past, handicapped the possible breadth of the field and made others in the profession hostile to it as an archaic historical holdout in an otherwise vibrant discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Canadian military history got its start at the core of traditional national history, as the field was developed by the military itself and near the center of the federal government.<sup>2</sup> The Canadian General Staff formed its own historical section as early as 1917 although not a single volume of official history was published before 1938, the year Colonel A.F. Duguid produced the first volume, largely focused on supply issues,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I make few distinctions between the literature on the First and Second World Wars. In one sense, studies of the Second World War differ from those of the First World War only in that new national objectives are perceived to have been achieved in the Great War while certain Canadian actions from 1939-45 very importantly solidified those gains. Historiographically, the Canadian Corps that fought at Vimy Ridge, for example, is a generational counterpart to that which took part in the Dieppe Raid of 1942. The roles military leaders and soldiers played in the Vimy/Dieppe campaigns especially have been discussed as a national trial by fire, two eras of combat when a bodily sacrifice was necessary to draw the Canadian national boundaries clearly and patriotically. Carl Berger has stated this point another way. As a far greater proportion of the troops in the Second World War were of Canadian birth than in the First World War, the men were encouraged to think of themselves as citizens of one country. "The Army was therefore not only a symbol of the nation; it was in a way the anvil of nationalism, a reforging of the commitments made in the First World War." Carl Berger, The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 171.

<sup>2</sup> There are some exceptions to this particular genesis theory as several important books were published during the Depression that did focus on military issues in the pre- or post-WW I period. As Carl Berger has pointed out, G.F.C. Stanley had by this time published The Birth of Western Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1936) which was very much concerned with military matters. Henry Borden had already issued Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1938) and French-English tension, exacerbated throughout the WW I years, had been considered by Elizabeth Armstrong, The Crisis in Quebec, 1914-1918 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937). These are just a few examples of what were possibly the last works that analyzed military issues within the context of Confederation rather than with the later, more nebulous concept of national unity.

of the Canadians in World War One.<sup>3</sup> There was little interest in recounting the horrors of WW I and even less interest in reading about them, especially considering that the possibility of a similar war was on the horizon. In addition to its subject matter being in low demand, the presentation style was off-putting to most. "Military history suffered from neglect partly because it was associated, especially by exponents of the 'new history,' with 'drum and trumpet' romanticism and the preoccupation with heroes and the great ones of the earth."<sup>4</sup> By the end of WW II, official histories, completed by an Historical Directorate led by university-trained researchers such as C.P. Stacey, G.F.C. Stanley and Gerald Graham, were to be approved by the highest military personnel, not only in plan of coverage but in their final drafts. This process of stamping the histories with a national seal of approval caused a great deal of tension between historians trained and uniquely qualified to write such history and the politicians who had a vested interest in the story being constructed in a certain way. In essence, this creative interference encouraged Stacey, Stanley and Graham to interpret Canada's military exploits in both Wars within an imperial framework. Additionally, each had spent time in London during the Second World War while Stanley and Stacey had done graduate work at Oxford and thus all easily understood the subordinate colonial position of Canada within the Empire.

The first head of the historical section, Stacey had a gift for dealing with British military bureaucracy and a strict respect for the chain of command and military

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<sup>3</sup> A.F. Duguid, Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938). This work eventually became secondary to G.W.L. Nicholson's The Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962) while in more recent years, the bottom-up analysis of Desmond Morton's amazing pair of texts, When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War (Toronto: Random House, 1993) and Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), has made them the key books on Canadians in WW I and an exception to the argument made here.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Berger, The Writing of Canadian History, 169.

regimentation in historical writing. He produced a three volume official history of Canadian land forces in WW II, along with various other related work spanning both Wars but with an eye toward topics with traditional national significance.<sup>5</sup> Stanley, the only Westerner in this Holy Trinity of military history, covered the entire gambit of Canada's military past and perhaps is the only Canadian historian to successfully build a dual-nationalism by balancing the representations of French and English contributions in war outside the realm of the conscription issue.<sup>6</sup> Gerald Graham, though less prolific in his academic publishing, taught for many years at a prestigious school in Great Britain and thus had a great though unquantifiable influence on Canadian historians who received their training overseas.<sup>7</sup> The search for nationhood within the Empire was certainly put on the agenda for future historians that came in contact with Graham. Many other key Canadian historians were involved in creating the official histories of our armed forces in the Second World War. J.M.S. Careless, G.W.L. Nicholson, Donald Kerr, David Spring and Eric Harrison all contributed to the project of recounting Canada's participation in WW II and in doing so, sparked the formation of historical

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Department of National Defence, General Staff, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, 3 volumes (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955-60) and The Canadian Army, 1939-1945: An Official Historical Summary (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), The Victory Campaign (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960) and Records of the Nile Voyageurs, 1884-1885 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1959). It is perhaps not surprising that J.L. Granatstein was one of Stacey's early students and was mentored in the importance of employing history for nationalistic goals. For a discussion of how Granatstein was able to secure the J.L. Ralston papers after Stacey had tried and failed, see C.P. Stacey, A Date With History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian (Ottawa, ON: Deneau Publications, 1983), 242.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Schurman claims Stanley's contribution "was to elucidate a joint Canadian heritage that dealt reasonably and even-handedly with the soldiers of both founding cultures." Donald Schurman, "Writing About War," in Writing About Canada: A Handbook for Modern Canadian History, ed. John Schultz (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990), 236. For a survey of the breadth of Stanley's work see New France: The Last Phase, 1744-1760 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), The War of 1812: Land Operations (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1983) and Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of An Unmilitary People (Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1954).

<sup>7</sup> Gerald Graham, ed., The Walker Expedition Against Quebec (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1953) and Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1950) which showed a rather uncharacteristic (for a Canadian) understanding of the correlation between sea power and imperialism. See also his inaugural lecture as the Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at the University of London, "The Maritime Foundations of Imperial History," *Canadian Historical Review* 21 (June 1950): 113-124.

departments in the Navy and Air Force and an interest in military history within the universities for the first time. It was this group of historians who solidified the binary theoretical relationship between military endeavors and nationhood. The interpretive framework developed within the Department of National Defense, the style in which military history was done in the immediate post-war period, is still the one in use today and was/is directed primarily at remembering the two World Wars as events of equal national significance to all Canadian citizens. Currently even privately published military history is of the “official” flavor because the intellectual boundaries around the field have not been renegotiated to reflect changing historiographical styles or the complexity of Canadian society. This binary is both regulative of military historians themselves and the standard by which they judge non-professional material such as memoirs.

While the controversy and debate surrounding the publication of J.L. Granatstein’s Who Killed Canadian History?<sup>8</sup> is now over seven years old and it would seem that those with a “view from the trenches”<sup>9</sup> have presented the sounder arguments, military history is apparently the one facet of old-school national history that has not been subject to thematic influences. A brief survey of the body of work done on Canadian military history shows a canon that has, for the most part, steadfastly withstood the intrusion of labor/class, gender, region, ethnic or migration historians. The non-porous nature of the parapets around military history goes a long way toward explaining the animosity most new left or post-modern historians exhibit when faced with the work the field generates. The irony is that military historians have absorbed

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<sup>8</sup> J.L. Granatstein, Who Killed Canadian History? (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins, 1998). Granatstein essentially continued his argument in discussions of the militia myth in Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2002) and the survey of military history, Who Killed the Canadian Military? (Toronto, ON: Harper Flamingo Canada, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> A.B. McKillop, “Who Killed Canadian History? A View From the Trenches,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 80/2 (June 1999).

subject matter of national concern and made it virtually unpalatable to the general public, that is, “Canadians’ general lack of enthusiasm for military matters...reflects the approach and focus of Canada’s military historians.”<sup>10</sup>

Historians within the field generally have blamed the John Q. Public victim for not being overly concerned with this country’s military past or future. Since the publication of George Stanley’s Canada’s Soldiers: The Military History of An Unmilitary People,<sup>11</sup> historians have assumed that the civilian nature of Canadian society condoned the practice of professional historians holding military history in trust until such point as it could be presented for national purposes. On the surface, if the inclusion of military history in the wider surveys of Canadian history is any indication, one would have to agree with the assumption that Canadians are still disinterested in military issues. Frustration within the military history field is the norm, as textbook after textbook is published without in-depth analysis of either World Wars. While the tide may be turning as military history gains some exposure in popular culture through mainly American films and fiction, Anne Foreman’s optimistic claims that “students are interested” and “the public seems insatiable for military history” seems unfounded.<sup>12</sup> The frustration of

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Schurman, “Writing About War,” 231.

<sup>11</sup> This assessment of Canadians as “unmilitary” has, both directly and indirectly, influenced all war-related works in the history field and the consequences of being “unmilitary” are the primary focal point in Canadian military history, a paradox considering they are also key to our national identity. Bureaucratic confusion, political scrambling, the dearth of training and the lost opportunities for enhanced performance occupy the paths taken by most military historians outside the realm of pure chronological description. This is especially true of several key texts on WW II. See for example John English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1991), Brereton Greenhous, C Force and Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe, 1941-45 (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Press, 1996), Tony Banham, Not the Slightest Chance: The Defence of Hong Kong (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2003) and Gerard S. Vano, Canada: The Strategic and Military Pawn (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1981). More recently, at least one historian has challenged this negative appraisal of overall Canadian performance. See Terry Copp, Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and Denis Whitaker, Shelagh Whitaker with Terry Copp, The Soldier’s Story: Victory at Falaise (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins, 2000). Not coincidentally I think, Copp began his career looking at the history of poverty in Montreal.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Foreman in the foreword to David A. Charters, Marc Milner and J.Brent Wilson, eds. Military History and the Military Profession (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1981).

military historians is internally generated however, as Canadians have no reason to get excited about military history until it is presented in a way that matters to the general population, a manner that somehow speaks to their “limited identities.” As Ramsay Cook has noted, “it might be just that it is in these limited identities that ‘Canadianism’ is found, and that except for our over-heated nationalist intellectuals, Canadians find this situation quite satisfactory.”<sup>13</sup> To enhance military history’s importance to the nation (a goal that Granatstein and like-minded people should endorse), it must attempt to construct a sort of national unity via an exploration of diverse wartime experiences. Logically, this would mean studying Canada and Canadians during wartime through class, cultural and regional history for example but always with an emphasis on how the Wars created the special circumstances in which that history was created.

While this thematic approach to military history would mean that individuals without much official status would begin to figure prominently, in the past military historians have manufactured an exclusive field, judging that the development of national history is far too important a job to be left to amateurs or those outside the power structure that existed during wartime. The most obvious evidence that military historians are skilled at patrolling the borders of the field is their profession-wide discomfort and avoidance of memoirs created outside the elite structure as a historical resource. It would seem that professional military historians are hostile to the memoir genre at least in part because it is seen to have been tainted by the contributions of a number of women whose experiences obviously do not fit into military history as it is currently done. It could be argued that because women were perhaps less nationalistic

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<sup>13</sup> Ramsay Cook, “Canadian Centennial Celebrations,” *International Journal* 22 (Autumn 1967), 663. See also Ramsay Cook, “Identities Are Not Like Hats,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81/2 (June 2000): 260-265.

than their male counterparts in their motivation for overseas or home front military involvement, they are naturally less inclined to paint over unpleasant events for the sake of saving national face. Indeed because women were not allowed to make anything like the total commitment to the country that enlisted men who actually fought were, they necessarily are less overtly and traditionally patriotic in their recollections than their male counterparts.<sup>14</sup> As in professional history in general, there is some question about the extent to which one should use memoir in researching Canada's war history and there is a standard hesitation to rely too heavily on stories that are particular to the person and cannot be easily generalized from. In fact, references to memoirs in academic citations appear only as source material used to cover certain relatively short periods of time when an official/national history did not yet exist or when the official history was deemed fatally flawed in some way.<sup>15</sup> One leading military historian claimed memoirs were problematic because they created "military managers (that) see the past

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<sup>14</sup>Among the best women's WW II memoirs are Phylis Bowman, *We Skirted the War!* (self-published, 1975), Ruth Tierney, *Petticoat Warfare* (Belleville, ON: Mika Publishing Company, 1984), Sue Ward, *One Gal's Army* (Prince George, BC: Caitlin Press, 1996), Mary M. White, *Hello War, Goodbye Sanity* (self-published, 1992), Phyllis D. Harrison, *Saga of An Airwoman* (Penticton, BC: self-published-Sage Press, 1995) and Verity Sweeny Purdy, *As Luck Would Have It: Adventures With the Canadian Army Show, 1943-1946* (St. Catherines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2003). An example of an author and veteran whose work has been widely employed by professional historians, perhaps because of his emphasis on technical artillery matters, is George Blackburn. See *The Guns of Normandy: A Soldier's Eye View, France 1944* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), *The Guns of Victory: A Soldier's Eye View, Belgium, Holland and Germany 1944-45* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1996) and *Where the Hell are the Guns? A Soldier's View of the Anxious Years 1939-1944* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1997).

<sup>15</sup>The best example of this is within Canadian naval history. The service waited until 1952 for an official history when Gilbert Tucker's two volume *The Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa, ON: King's Printer) was published. Not well-received, Tucker's work was soon given less priority than Joseph Schull's *The Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in the Second World War* (Ottawa, ON: King's Printer, 1950). An ex-navy man himself, Schull's book was a "popular" history of the Royal Canadian Navy with a personal tone. Likewise the Alan Easton book *50 North: An Atlantic Battleground* (Toronto, ON: Ryerson Press, 1963), arguably the best Naval memoir yet produced, was used as a substitute for more professional publications. References in academic work to Naval memoirs have dropped off as a result of the publications of W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty and Michael Whitby, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1945, Volume II Part I* (St. Catherines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2003), Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montreal, PQ: Art Global, 1998) and Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Likewise, scholars now more likely first turn to, for example, Greenhous, Harris, Johnston and Rawling, *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, volume 3* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1994) than Robert Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall: An Ordinary Airman's War* (Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986) for information on the RCAF.



mainly through the eyes of soldiers. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does limit our horizons.”<sup>16</sup> Though those in the field have been reluctant to incorporate many oral sources, some more recent Canadian military history has used interviews, eyewitness accounts, letters and memoirs to support the claims made.<sup>17</sup> John Keegan, while arguing that “the history of the Second World War has not yet been written,” supports the movement to incorporate both biographies and autobiographies into the history of the Wars, despite or because of those works’ “small unit and individual level” foundations.<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting the caste system within the military itself, the professional-amateur line is also drawn in the authors’ arena, the field characterized by blatant academic snobbery. Donald Schurman has expressed the most direct concern, commenting that the “outpouring of military writing of indifferent quality and dubious intent [by non-professional writers]...(has) increased the general public’s interest in military affairs on the one hand, and added significantly to the pile of published junk on the other.” Further, “while overall interest in military matters has grown, the proportion of serious writers concerned with military history remains small; the number of professional military historians even smaller.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, memoirs written by those outside of the officer

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<sup>16</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, “In Memoriam G.W.L. Nicholson and J.A. Swettenham: History and the Military,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 10/1 (Summer 1980), 46.

<sup>17</sup> The late Dan Dancocks was an example of a military historian who could quite effortlessly incorporate personal commentaries into an academic exploration. Although he wrote on both World Wars, the best sample of his highly readable style is *The D-Day Dodgers: The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1991). Taking up where Dancocks left off is Mark Zuehlke, whose books *Ortona: Canada’s Epic World War II Battle* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart Publishing, 1999), *The Liri Valley: Canada’s World War II Breakthrough to Rome* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart Publishing, 2001) and *The Gothic Line: Canada’s Month of Hell in World War II in Italy* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003) incorporate a variety of source material and although detailed, are easily comprehensible.

<sup>18</sup> John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Refighting World War Two* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Books Canada, 1995), 30, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Schurman, “Writing About War,” 244. There is a very strong distinction drawn here between military history and the history of foreign/defence policy (a distinction that arises only when those within the profession judge the contributions of those outside of it), the implication being that non-professional writers are not qualified to consider the weighty matters of national security and external affairs.

hierarchy are generally disregarded but those written by Brigadiers, Generals and Majors are often received as valuable academic resources despite the similar absence of any attempt at objectivity.<sup>20</sup> In addition, it would seem that biographies written by otherwise well-respected historians on Canada's military greats are so often fraught with a hero-worshipping neglect of any sort of solid critique as to be historically useless. In the bid to have military history colored with the deeds of great men and thus be more in line with traditional military history, historians have in the past basically written non-analytical and shallow personality studies. Biographies of General Guy Simonds, Arthur Currie, Sir William Otter, and Major-General George Pearkes, for example, certainly draw a clear picture of their subject but tend to be inordinately acclamatory and so are of a reduced value as a historical resource.<sup>21</sup> Probably the absolute worst of these types of histories is J.A. Swettenham's three volumes on A.G.L. McNaughton, which covers the life of the former Minister of National Defence from before the Great War through to the post-WW II years. Criticized for being unduly flattering and neglecting some of the available archival resources, the work was "John Swettenham's personal salute to the great country in which he was so proud to live." Logically, the salute was

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<sup>20</sup> See for example E.L.M. Burns, General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars (Toronto, ON: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1970), Chris Vokes with John Maclean, Vokes: My Story (Ottawa, ON: Gallery Books, 1985), George Kitching, Mud and Green Fields: The Memoirs of General George Kitching (Langley, BC: Battleline Books, 1986) and William Henry Pope, Leading From the Front: The War Memoirs of Harry Pope (Waterloo, ON: The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Dominick Graham, The Price of Command: A Biography of General Guy Simonds (Toronto, ON: Stoddart Publishing, 1993), A.M.J. Hyatt, General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Desmond Morton, The Canadian General Sir William Otter (Toronto, ON: Hakkert Ltd., 1974) and R.H. Roy, For Most Conspicuous Bravery: A Biography of Major-General George R. Pearkes, VC, Through Two World Wars (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, 1977). A more balanced analysis of the characteristics of military leadership appears in parts of Bern Horn and Stephen Harris, eds., Warrior Chiefs (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Press, 2001) and Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2001).

eventually rewarded with Swettenham's appointment to the Canadian War Museum as Senior Historian.<sup>22</sup>

Biographers of key political figures, though these subjects' connection with national issues in the past is often more direct than that of military leaders, have in some measure avoided unconditional regard for their subjects while still being an example of top-down history. O.D. Skelton's Laurier and Desmond Morton's A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War are two examples of relatively non-biased work on the elite of the period.<sup>23</sup> For the interwar period up to the post-war years, J.W. Pickersgill and D. Forster's The Mackenzie King Record and J.L. Granatstein's The Ottawa Men provide solid biographical information<sup>24</sup> on the political maneuvering far behind the front lines.

In one important sense, military historians have used memoirs and biographies to forward the thesis that "the organization and social composition of Canada's armed forces (were)...uniquely Canadian" because personnel that were "more independent and less respectful of authority" waged war in a different way than their American and British counterparts. Thus understanding the individual (though elite in most cases) level of war can, in some cases, shed light on Canada's national character through its military history.<sup>25</sup> The publishing trend we see now of edited collections of the letters and diary entries of average citizens from our past, the best of the military version being

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<sup>22</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, "In Memoriam," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> O.D. Skelton, Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1921) and Desmond Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1982). See also J.M. Bliss, A Canadian Millionaire (Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1978) and R.C. Brown, Robert Laird Borden: A Biography (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1975, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> J.W. Pickersgill and D. Forster, The Mackenzie King Record (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1960-70) and J.L. Granatstein, The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957 (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, "Marching to Different Drums: Canadian Military History," *The Journal of Military History* 56 (April 1992), 249.

the Granatstein and Hillmer book Battle Lines,<sup>26</sup> would seem to lend itself well to this tactic. It seems logical then, too, that though individual and non-elite remembrances of war may be viewed as threatening to a “national picture,” problems in military leadership (a common thread in the assessments of Canada’s military past) often become clear through sharp-end enlisted personnel’s autobiographies and thus these works have something to say about the performance of this country’s leading military officials. The fact is that soon autobiographies, along with letters and diaries, will be the only oral source available on this subject matter and while they lack the meta-narrative style of the professional historian, “they make up for it with a much more vivid sense of what the waiting and fighting were really like.”<sup>27</sup> Eventually, military history’s animosity toward oral sources will drastically limit the number of available research resources in the field and restrict the quality of scholarship compared to other fields within the discipline.

Generally speaking, there has been work done that contradicts my point here. Ruth Roach Pierson’s The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood is unarguably gender history (although the work lacks the more current professional technique of exploring masculinity in concert with femininity), for example, and E.L.M. Burns’ Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945<sup>28</sup> could be loosely interpreted as labor history. More recently, Jeff Keshen’s Saints, Sinners and Soldiers very deftly discusses issues of economics, race, youth, gender and labour on the home front during World War II while basically ignoring the actual war until the second last

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<sup>26</sup> J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, Battle Lines: Eyewitness Accounts From Canada’s Military History (Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> John Bemrose, “War Stories That Speak Volumes: Historians and Memoirists Mark the VE-Day Anniversary with an Armada of Books,” *Maclean’s Magazine* 108/19 (May 8, 1995): 73-74.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, “They’re Still Women After All:” The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) and E.L.M. Burns, Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945 (Toronto, ON: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1956).

chapter.<sup>29</sup> But far from setting some sort of example for other historians to follow, these works are part of what seems to be a “gap-filling” historiographical motivation, that is, historical work undertaken in order to address a specific question or issue that creates no research spin-offs. Other thematic studies have created some continued dialogue but, other than employing the war years as a time line, do not explicitly deal with the wars themselves. Several books have come to public attention that document some facet of ethnic history, for example, during the war years, but, I would argue, emphasize the group over the war or the theme over the event. While they are home front focused, studies of the Japanese internment<sup>30</sup> and the plight of conscientious objectors such as the Mennonites, for instance, have not generally been studies of the Second World War and seem oddly estranged from the conflict that created their topical foundation. Probably the one ethnic group that has been subjected to a military history treatment are Native Americans, the historians of whom have reported on their involvement in the armed forces of WW I, WW II and the Korean conflict.<sup>31</sup> Even that history, though, has not encouraged much debate or follow-up research. My claim here that military history has been relatively unscathed by more current trends in thematic history is subject to two more concrete exceptions, the expression of regional interests and French/English cultural conflict.

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<sup>29</sup> Jeff Keshen, Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> See for example Ann Gomer Sunahara, The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War (Toronto, ON: Lorimer, 1981), Ken Adachi, The Enemy That Never Was: A History of Japanese Canadians (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) and Patricia Roy, et al., Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese During the Second World War (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> See James L. Demspey, Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1999), Fred Gaffen, Forgotten Soldiers (Penticton, BC: Theyfus Books, 1985) and Janice Summerby, Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, Veteran Affairs, 1993). The attitudes held by English-Canadians toward First Nations people during the Second World War (rather than the contribution of Natives in that struggle *per se*) is covered by R. Scott Sheffield, The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the 'Indian' and the Second World War (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

Regional interests have been articulated to some small degree within military history, although the facts of history have allowed this to occur seemingly without any need for a reduction in territoriality from those in the traditional military history garrison. The geographically based militia system, the consequences of which were visible even up to the middle of the Second World War, begat regiments with strong regional affiliations and created circumstances whereby regimental studies in effect were/are regional studies of a sort. Regimental histories then often contain some subtext on the social, political, cultural and economic factors within the region the group was founded, especially in the examination of the years leading up to its international deployment.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, studies of services that were geographically concentrated in one place contain at least some component of regional history. Most obviously, the Navy's Maritime environment during both World Wars has meant that a good portion of history done in that field has included at least some study of the geographical context.<sup>33</sup> Most of these works center on regional economies while only a handful consider the surrounding social climate. Very few full-length studies have emphasized region as a context for

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<sup>32</sup> See for example David Bercuson, Battalion of Heroes: The Calgary Highlanders in World War II (Calgary, AB: The Calgary Highlanders Regimental Funds Foundation, 1994), W.T. Barnard, The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 1860-1960: One Hundred Years of Canada (Don Mills, ON: Ontario Publishing Company Ltd., 1960) and G.W.L. Nicholson, The Fighting Newfoundlanders: A History of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment (St. John's, NFLD: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1964).

<sup>33</sup> Even broader service histories have some inherent regional angles. Marc Milner, for example, has pointed out two rather key region variations that affected the performance of the Canadian Navy during WW II. Firstly, naval technologies developed by the National Research Council in Ottawa were consistently subject to trial runs on the Ottawa River, fresh water with drastically different temperatures and other characteristics that were different from conditions found in the North Atlantic. Secondly, the nature of the ocean floor along Canada's east coast demanded Canadian proficiency in bathythermography and seriously compromised the effectiveness of asdic in this area. Marc Milner, North Atlantic Run: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1985) and The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive Against Germany's Submarines (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1995). For a similar regional analysis, see David Zimmerman, The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1989) and Stephen Kimber, Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War (Toronto, ON: Anchor Canada, 2003).

studying war, although John Thompson's The Harvests of War and Barbara Wilson's Ontario and the First World War provide a good blueprint for this sort of study.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, military history has not escaped the French/English framework of analysis that can alternatively be considered one founded on region or part of the larger "story of the triumphs and tribulations of the nation-state in Canada."<sup>35</sup> Conscription 1917, edited by Carl Berger, and Granatstein's Conscription in the Second World War, 1939-1945 both attempt to consider the two conflicting wartime definitions of nation among French and English factions in Canada, as do books by R.M. Dawson and a collaborative effort by Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman.<sup>36</sup> While conscription provided the most evident example of the tension between French and English throughout the first half of the twentieth century and the differing connections to the British Empire, other more subtle issues are dealt with in virtually every military history work completed in Canada. Most survey texts in the field do, for example, include at least some brief examination of the Anglophone nature of Canada's armed forces, the differences in recruiting tactics and wartime propaganda, and the special associations between Quebec and France during WW I and WW II. The few studies of Quebec regiments and the autobiographies of Francophone military leaders also provide information on Quebec's involvement in providing overseas combatants.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Wilson, Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents (Toronto, ON: Champlain Society, 1979) and John Thompson, The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1979). See also Leslie Frost, Fighting Men (Toronto, ON: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1967) for a history of WW I in Orillia, Ontario.

<sup>35</sup> A.B. McKillop, "A View From the Trenches," 296.

<sup>36</sup> J.L. Granatstein, Conscription in the Second World War, 1939-1945: A Study in Political Management (Toronto, ON: Ryerson Press, 1969), Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945 (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1975) and Granatstein and Hitsman, Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1977). See also Carl Berger, ed., Conscription 1917 (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1969) and R.M. Dawson, The Conscription Crisis of 1944 (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

<sup>37</sup> See Serge Bernier, The Royal 22e Regiment (Montreal: Art Global, 1999), J.V. Allard, The Memoirs of General Jean V. Allard (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1988) and Jean Pariseau and Serge Bernier, Les Canadiens français et

Obviously, the analytical framework that would most appropriately fit 21<sup>st</sup> century military history is one that is event driven. In this scenario, both World Wars could be examined as events within which gender, ethnic and labor history, for example, could be explored. The breadth of exploration on this basis would be virtually limitless and in the end, form a body of work on “Canadians at War” that reflects the experiences of all Canadians across the country, from different cultural and racial backgrounds and both genders and from each strata in the class hierarchy. Such a canon would represent the national perception of past wars and thus do more for unity, patriotism and the military field than virtually anything that has already been written. Conversely, what is absolutely key to future studies of gender, ethnicity, class and region that span the war years is that the subjects be analyzed under the rubric of military history, that the studies somehow be tied in both their methodology and narrative to the event of war. As Ramsay Cook and J.M.S. Careless have argued for over thirty years, it is the tension between the particular and the national that is the key to engaging history and while other fields within the history discipline have experienced an intellectual expansion into these thematic areas, the military history establishment has to its own detriment resisted more pluralistic explorations.

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