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The Cherry Beret by Ashton L. Kerr [Review]

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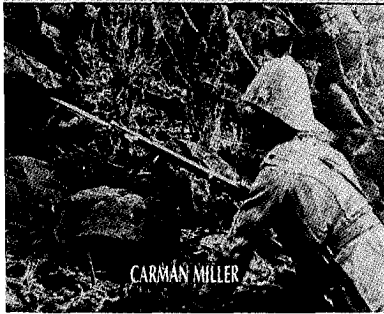
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PAINTING THE MAP RED

CANADA AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR
1899 - 1902



Miller has done such a good job, he has made the wait all the more worthwhile.

The South African War has always been an interest of this reviewer, though previously having had to rely largely on British sources. So it is satisfying now to be given a look at the whole story of the over 7,000 Canadians who volunteered to fight in Britain's cause in southern Africa at the turn of the century. Perhaps the lack of major reference works is why our nation's part in the war receives scant attention in history class curriculums. Or, there could be some squeamishness about our country's enthusiastic role in what has been described as Britain's last colonial war.

The Anglo-Boer conflict foreshadowed events of only a few years later, during the 1914-1918 Great War. As in that much larger conflict, the Boer War brought first an enormous surge of patriotism for King and Empire, droves of eager volunteers, followed by a manpower crisis after sobering news of heavy casualties from bullet and

disease (270 Canadian soldiers died there). There was the same florid political arguments, regional disagreements, national navel-gazing about the wisdom of Canadian participation, and a quite strong anti-war movement.

Thoroughly covering civilian events, Miller's main emphasis is on the war front: the generally valiant combat experiences of our troops, despite having been hastily trained. Battlefield accounts follow individual officers and soldiers in action, including a superb description of the Royal Canadian Regiment's victory at Paardeberg. In addition to detailing famed conventional regiments, Miller also tells of "Howard's Canadian Scouts," a colourful bunch of rough-riding irregulars. The photographs and numerous maps in Carman Miller's extensively-researched book are particularly useful in helping understand the course of Canadian operations during the South African war. Highly recommended.

Sidney Allinson
Victoria, B.C.

The Cherry Beret

Colonel Ashton L. Kerr, MD. *The Cherry Beret: Distant recollections of World War II as remembered by one of the first Canloan officers.* published privately, 125 pages.

Dr. Kerr has written a light 125 page story of how he became a Canloan officer to the British Army, and thereafter what happened to him during the Second World War.

In 1941, on the day after finishing his internship, and

although he had already been accepted in a neurosurgery residence, Dr. Kerr decided to forgo it all and joined the Canadian army. Soon after, he was on the Volunteer "Q" list of 43 Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps officers on loan to the British, and on his way over to Europe.

A hand-drawn map and over 25 black and white photographs are used to enliven and enlighten us about Colonel Kerr's travels. The assignments and duties took him to North Africa and England where he trained. Afterwards, he participated in the invasions of Italy and Southern France and in the liberation of Greece. His final assignment prior to returning to Canada was in Palestine, where he was involved in the peace keeping.

During his stay in Europe, he managed to come in contact with several famous personages such as Evelyn Waugh, Ambassador John Winant and Daphne du Maurier. These meetings are always presented with modesty and Dr. Kerr's characteristic sense of understatement. He concludes this autobiographical sojourn with several brief vignettes of other Canloan medical officers.

There are many history books about World War II filled with statistics and analyses of various campaigns. This book has none of that. Rather, it reminded me of a grandfather talking to his grandchildren trying to highlight the more humane aspects of being a soldier.

Indeed, this is a book with a gentle spirit which should be read by any and all ages.

Lt-Colonel Markus C. Martin
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