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Legacy of Courage: Calgary's Own 137th Battalion by Fred Bagley and Dr. H.D. Duncan [Review]

R. Bruce McIntyre

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his original research in the form of a book. Both specialists and general readers will be pleased by the results because the author possesses a real understanding of early 19th century military practices and is able to convey his knowledge through clear prose that is free of jargon.

After a brief review of the course of the war up to 1814, the author looks at the state of the two forces that were to meet at Chippawa. Graves devotes a half-dozen chapters to the actual engagement and skilfully merges accounts by participants with official military records. The three maps that accompany the narrative make it possible to follow the movements on both sides and the book contains one hundred illustrations. The appendices offer lists of casualties and discuss a number of myths that have grown up around the battle. For example, Graves convincingly puts to rest the legend that the victorious Americans burned the bodies of their fallen opponents, and proves that they were simply buried instead.

Graves' examination shows that the battle was fought primarily by seasoned professionals. This helps explain why such a short encounter led to so many casualties. The author estimates that between musket skirmishes in the surrounding woods and artillery battles on the plain some 200 combatants were killed. Graves wants his readers to understand that war at any time is "brutal business" and his discussion of the weapons employed at the battle certainly bear this out. For example, at a range of 700 yards, a common twelve pound cannon ball could penetrate thirty-six human beings. That sort of technical information makes it easier for a modern reader to understand how dangerous the life of a 19th century infantryman really was.

This book, with its balanced account of the actions on both

sides, is intended to appeal to readers in both the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, some research-related omissions and minor errors appear to have survived the editorial process. For example, Appendix C, which deals with weapons, includes a string of rather curious imperial to metric conversions. We are told that a six pound cannonball somehow weighed 13.2 kilograms, or more than twenty-nine pounds. In Appendix E Graves presents a list of twenty-one militiamen killed at the battle, but it too seems to be unreliable. A quick check of the pension lists published in the 11 December 1817 *Niagara Spectator* revealed that Sergeant Solomon Mills of the 2nd York died at Chippawa, but his name is not included. I first examined the newspaper because Graves has Private Stephen Peer listed twice, but the text, and official records, suggest there was only one individual with that name killed at the battle. Obviously these are minor problems that will not trouble the general reader, but a more thorough review of the appendices and notes seems in order before a second edition is published.

Graves has much to be proud of with this work. *Red Coats & Grey Jackets* is an engaging and informative example of the best sort of military history being written today.

George Sheppard

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A Legacy of Courage

Fred Bagley and Dr. Harvey Daniel Duncan. *A Legacy of Courage: Calgary's Own 137th Overseas Battalion, CEF*. Calgary: Pulp Street Books, 1994. 247 pages, \$19.95.

This account of Calgary's 137th battalion is a reasonably solid work detailing the formation of the battalion in November 1915 until its return to Canada in 1919. The 975 men who made up the battalion were primarily labourers and farmers from southern Alberta. The book traces the training of the battalion at Sarcee Camp and in England, describing the partial dismemberment of the battalion in August 1916 with elements of the 137th being sent to France. Through two years of fighting, 179 men of the 137th were killed, and 392 wounded, which translates into a 60 per cent casualty rate for the battalion.

The text is divided into three sections. Part I, the weakest portion of the book, provides an historical overview of the entire Canadian contribution to the Allied effort throughout the First World War. Part II, by far the strongest part of the text, is based on the diaries of one the principle authors, Dr. Harvey Duncan, who served as a private in the battalion. Bagley integrates the memoirs of the young 20-year-old Duncan into the text, and this provides a fresh and realistic account of his experiences from the time of his enlistment in 1916 until his return to Canada in 1919. Through his writings, the reader can share in Duncan's initial fear at Vimy Ridge in April 1917, then his, and the battalion's sense of accomplishment following the Canadian victory. The reader also shares in Duncan's sense of disillusionment following his participation at Passchendaele, where the battalion suffered heavy casualties, among them Duncan who was wounded by mortar fire.

The final section of the book documents the efforts by some members of the battalion to organize annual reunions of battalion survivors, the strong involvement of the battalion in community projects, and the

work of 137th Battalion Association to establish memorials and parks throughout Calgary to honour the memory of the servicemen of the 137th.

Unfortunately, the chronology of Bagley's text is difficult to follow. The book constantly jumps back and forth between 1916 and 1918 making it very confusing for the reader. The text could have been much stronger had Bagley simply followed a precise and coherent chronological order. Instead,

Bagley's organization confuses and detracts from the historical account. The book would be of primary interest to those most familiar with the strong military tradition associated with the city of Calgary. However, the memoirs of Duncan are both insightful and passionate and would appeal to those with general interest of a Canadian perspective of "life in the trenches."

R. Bruce McIntyre
University of Calgary

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