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Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942–1945 by David Reynolds [Review]

J.L. Granatstein
York University

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rich Relations

David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (New York and Toronto: Random House, 1995) 555 pages, \$30.

This book has been much praised and deservedly so. It is wellwritten and well-researched, and *mirabile dictu*, it includes substantial material on the impact of the half-million Canadians who, along with some three million Americans, served time in Britain during the Second World War.

Reynolds, a Cambridge University historian married to an American, has done extensive research in the British, American, and Canadian archives, and he has read widely in the secondary literature. The result is a detailed examination of the way different cultures dealt with each other, clashed or integrated, and how the respective bureaucracies tried to cope. There is even some material on how Canadians and Americans got on - badly at first but better as time went on, thanks, Reynolds opines, to the fact that Canadians came to see that their British past was being replaced by an American future. He even cites Major-General F.F. Worthington as suggesting that since American equipment and ideas were better than those of the British, Canadians should try to serve with the U.S. forces. No wonder Fighting Frank had to be got rid of in 1944!

The Americans, of course, had special problems - black soldiers, for example - that the Canadians scarcely had and, according to black GIs, the Canadian Army handled matters much better. The

Americans also wanted their full pay, better food than hungry British civilians, and the right to try their soldiers in their own courts; they had sufficient clout to get their way (including food that amounted to three times the civilian ration). And the Canadians? For the most part, Canadians lived on the execrable British rations, in Britain and in action, part of their higher pay than British soldiers received was deferred or assigned back home, and the Canadian authorities went along with the application of British justice to their military miscreants. Reynolds notes dryly that two Americans serving in the Canadian Army robbed a Briton at gunpoint and were sentenced to imprisonment and the lash; the U.S. ambassador intervened successfully to have the whipping foregone. Too bad Ambassador Winant - or someone - wasn't there to assist Canadian soldiers on their way to Dartmoor and/or the Glasshouse. Essentially, the conclusion from this study is that Canada's military acted like that of a colonial state; the Americans demanded that they be treated as equals and were.

In his one full chapter on the Canadians, "A Day Trip to Dieppe," Reynolds makes the case - in contradistinction to Desmond Morton and others who have suggested that the Canadians were not champing at the bit to see action - that morale in 1942 was such a serious problem that the Canadian commanders virtually had to get their troops into action. And, he points out, even after the August 1942 debacle, morale rose in virtually all units. At last, the Canadians had fought, the single day at Dieppe helping to put an end to the constant carping from the British about how long the

Canadians were going to sit in beautiful Salisbury doing nothing.

Sex naturally enters into the story, and Reynolds is interesting here. Forty percent of Canadians who fell victim to venereal disease had had intercourse in London; only 30 per cent of Americans became infected there. (I must admit to being unsure what this means.) Eventually, the Canadian and American forces jointly persuaded the reluctant British to tackle the VD epidemic with a program of tracing sexual contacts, along the lines of those long employed in North America, that had some success. GIs, Reynolds also says, complained that British condoms were too small, presumably more American bragging; Canadians said nothing - yet another effort by their generals at getting along? And there were more difficulties in the way of a GI trying to marry a British civilian than faced a Canadian. The result was more Canadian war brides than American, despite the much larger numbers of Americans stationed in the U.K. Of course, Canadians were there longer, and briefly in 1940 and for some time after 1942, many were billeted on British civilians. That presumably speeded the Canadians on their way to ever-closer relations. Reynolds also notes that the arrival of Americans in quantity, from 1942 on, helped ease Anglo-Canadian relations - the Canadians could join the Brits in complaining about the bloody Yanks!

Still, the author can make mistakes. He refers to the Princess Patricia's Regiment, for example, and suggests that Militia regiments made up half the 1st Canadian Division in 1939 and militia soldiers half the personnel strength of the division. Not so, when the

Permanent Force, not all of which was in the 1st Division, numbered only 4,500. He says that Montgomery commanded two Canadian corps in 1941-2, again incorrect, and he perhaps strains a bit to suggest that Canadian and British formations were all but interchangeable. More seriously than these minor slips, Reynolds says nothing about the RCAF and RCN who had their own tens of thousands serving in Britain.

Still, this is a splendid book, a model of comparative history that is based on wide-ranging primary source research. Charles Stacey and Barbara Wilson wrote the book on Canadians in Britain, but Reynolds has demonstrated that by bringing the Americans into equation (in much the largest way, of course), the worth of this kind of history can be increased greatly.

J.L. Granatstein
York University

(J.L. Granatstein is co-author, with Desmond Morton of *Victory 1945*.)

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The U-Boat Hunters

Marc Milner, *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive against Germany's Submarines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) \$35.00, 326 pages, (ISBN 0-8020-0588-8).

In this companion book to *North Atlantic Run*, Marc Milner takes an in depth look at the second half of the U-Boat war, and the involvement of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Allied victory. Milner briefly recaps the dismal state of the RCN in early 1943, and then takes the reader through the political, administrative, tactical, and technical advances made during 1944-1945. Although this latter half of the Atlantic war has been traditionally shunned by

historians, Milner's careful research uncovers the incredible advances made by both the Allies and the Germans in the 'art' of submarine warfare. From the German Navy Acoustic Torpedo (GNAT), to the Canadian Anti-Acoustic Torpedo gear (CAT), and the British FOXER, the reader is introduced to the nuances of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) in the Second World War.

This book remains, however, an account of the Canadian contribution to the victory at sea. As with his earlier work, *North Atlantic Run*, Milner is not uncritical of the manner in which it was conducted. With the success of the convoy system finally assured, "hunter-killer" groups were formed to specifically destroy submarines. Zones of responsibility were established, which saw the United States Navy with its carrier-based groups, taking a larger share of the responsibility. In some cases, this marginalized the Canadian effort.

There were many different reasons for this occurrence, not the least of which was the unavailability of modern equipment for Canadian use. Certainly the aspirations of Admiral Percy Nelles and the professional navy for its postwar fleet, were partly to blame. Other reasons have a basis in decisions not to pursue the construction of more advanced types of escorts, such as the superb Castle-class corvette. The abortive Canadian designed RX/C radar was yet another set back. A sensitive unit, it worked very well, when it worked, but its maintenance requirements were such that it was impractical for active duty.

With the arrival of long range patrol (LRP) aircraft such as the B-24 Liberator, and the availability of better 10 cm radar sets, the nature of the Atlantic war was drastically changing by late 1944. Ships equipped with type 144/45 sonar, and the "Q" attachment, as well as the more advanced type 147B sonar, made identifying a submarine in open water easier.

This resulted in the Escort Groups achieving a much higher success rate against U-Boats. However, the problem of identifying a submerged submarine in shallow inshore waters, persisted throughout the war. Situations such as the "layering" of water due to differing temperatures played havoc with accurate identification. Therefore spring and fall became the best times for sub-hunting. The technology of bathythermography was developed in an attempt to combat this situation, and was marginally successful. Other methods were developed to tackle the threat of the U-Boat such as hunts to exhaustion. These so called "salmon operations" were organized in an effort to kill elusive U-Boats, but usually resulted in the vast expenditure of explosives with little to show.

Canadian support groups had, by wars end, become quite adept at sinking U-Boats; and what makes this achievement remarkable was the fact that it was accomplished almost solely by the volunteer navy. As Milner suggests, the professional navy was concerned with postwar careers, and the accumulation of fleet destroyers, cruisers, and aircraft carriers. But he never lets the reader forget that the Canadian Navy's primary responsibility was the safe escort of convoys; something which was accomplished with great success, under the most dire of circumstances.

In the end, *The U-Boat Hunters* is presented as a well-researched account of the late war activities of the RCN. A "good read," it is supported by maps, photographs, comprehensive notes, and a listing of U-Boat kills by the RCN from May 1943 to May 1945. This volume is a welcome addition to Milner's first book *North Atlantic Run*, and should be enjoyed by the Naval fraternity and the general public alike.

Rob Bromley
Wilfrid Laurier University

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