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The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive Against Germany's Submarines by Marc Milner [Review]

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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
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(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
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Hell Upon Earth

J. Clinton Morrison, Jr., *Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War, 1914-1918*. Privately published (available from the author, 157 Victoria Rd., Summerside, PEI, C1N 2G6), 1995, 359pp (ISBN 0-9691824-1-4)

A Prince Edward Islander who enlisted for service in the First World War had a worse than a one in three chance of coming home unscathed. Some 4,000 joined up over the course of the war, and over 1,500 were killed, wounded, missing, or captured. These numbers are even more impressive when it is noted that PEI was the only province which did not send an intact battalion to the front. Though the Island sent two siege batteries to the front, its only infantry battalion, the 105th, got as far as England before being broken up for reinforcements. It is somehow fitting, then, that these soldiers, scattered as they were throughout the Canadian Expeditionary Force, should have their experiences brought together in this fine book.

Hell Upon Earth tells the story of the soldiers through the letters they wrote home, and through interviews the author conducted with the few surviving Island veterans. The book is divided into two sections. The first is a chronological examination of the war, with the letters and recollections set against the backdrop of the larger war. The second section is thematic, and examines the soldiers' experiences through the eyes of Islanders. In both sections, Morrison has provided just enough background material to give the context and to tie the letters together into a very readable narrative.

The book is filled with quite striking passages, like Bert Duvar's candid admission in May 1915 that "I have had enough of Salisbury Plain to last me a couple of lifetimes at least," or Parker Crockett's lament that the war was very different than their training had led them to believe and that "instead of fighting men alone we have to fight machinery of the very latest and most deadly kinds." There are also plenty of those almost inconsequential episodes which obviously made a very deep impression on those men who lived

through them. Joseph Managhan of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry wrote to his father that he had borrowed a box of matches from a pal to light his pipe, but when he turned around to give them back seconds later the man was dead.

Of course, some readers might quibble over the use of letters as a main source. Whether they were written to loved ones or published in newspapers (as many of these were), one might expect them to be overly rosy, patriotic, and bracing. Yet they are none of these things, thanks to Morrison's obvious care in selecting them. The letters he has chosen have an immediacy and ring of truth that makes them utterly convincing, and indeed the reader will marvel at the frank comments which not only passed the censors but were considered suitable for publication in newspapers.

There are occasions when the author has too readily taken the letters at face value. For example, he accepts too easily the hatred of Canadian soldiers for the Germans that was a feature of so many letters. It now seems clear that there was little personal animosity between individual soldiers on either side of no-man's-land, who were more likely to take a 'live and let live' attitude. In this case, Morrison has read too much into comments that were more likely made and published for propaganda purposes. Nevertheless, such misinterpretations are few, and one cannot help but agree with the author's claim that in general the book "accurately depicts the various aspects of the war as experienced by PEI soldiers who went overseas."

Clinton Morrison is a noted local historian who embarked upon this research in part as a tribute to his father, an airman during the Second World War. It is also a fitting tribute to Island soldiers of an earlier war. Assiduously researched and engagingly written, *Hell Upon Earth* deserves a wide readership.

Jonathan F. Vance
Wilfrid Laurier University

Coming Events

McCrae House. Guelph, Ontario, Canada

McCrae Poppy Sale May and June 1996 - Poppy plants for sale at McCrae House. Four varieties - Only \$1.00 per plant with proceeds to McCrae House. Remembrance Week Ham Radio Broadcast - November 6-11, 1996. Guelph Amateur Radio Operators send messages of peace around the world from McCrae House. Programs available by appointment. For more information call (519) 846-1482

H.M.C.S. HAIDA Naval Museum. Ontario Place, Toronto, Canada

On July 20, 1996 H.M.C.S. HAIDA Naval Museum will be hosting a special day devoted to the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service who will be on board to chat with visitors and who will provide a musical performance at 2 pm. All are welcome. Call (416) 314-9755 for more information.

8th Military History Colloquium. Wilfrid Laurier University, will be held on May 2 & 3, 1997. Please send paper proposals to Mike Bechthold, LCMSDS, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3C5 by 31 Jan. 1997.

3rd Annual Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation Study Tour. June 1997. Applicants should send two letters of reference, a copy of their university transcript and a typed personal statement explaining their reasons for applying to Prof. S.F. Wise, Department of History, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, K1S 5V6.

Please let us know about your events!
Send the information to the address at the front of the journal.