

2007

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# CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

Volume 16, Number 2

Spring 2007

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# CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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## Canadian War Museum

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**T**he Canadian War Museum, the national military history museum, is a living memorial to those men and women who served in Canada's armed forces. It is also a centre for research and dissemination of information and expertise on all aspects of the country's military past from pre-contact era to the present. It preserves the artifacts of Canadian military experience, interprets them for present and future generations, and advances the professional study of Canadian military history, including the effects of war and conflict on the nation and all its citizens.

## The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies

**T**he purpose of the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) is to foster research, teaching, and public discussion of military and strategic issues of national and international significance. The Centre is intentionally multi-disciplinary; it has strong commitments in military history, with emphasis on the Canadian experience, and in strategic and operational studies, with emphasis on disarmament. LCMSDS supports both basic and applied research as well as teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the extensive program of LCMSDS workshops, conferences, public lectures, and publications encourages informed discussion of international security and of Canada's national interests in military and strategic issues - past, present and future.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies was founded in 1991 as a Research Centre affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. Its primary support has come from the Department of National Defence and from Wilfrid Laurier University. The Director of the Centre is Professor Terry Copp, Professor of History.

## From the Editor-in-Chief

S.F. ("Syd") Wise, a leader of international stature in the development of military history since the 1950s, died in Ottawa on 8 March. He was 82, and still engaged in research. An article on his life and work will appear in the next issue, but I wanted to take this early opportunity to recognize his contribution. A native of Toronto, he went directly from high school graduation into the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1943. Immediately after the war, he entered honours history at the University of Toronto, graduating as a gold medallist in 1949. While working on his MA (awarded in 1953) he became a lecturer at the Royal Military College of Canada, and then a professor at Queen's University. In 1966 he was selected by Charles Stacey, who had come out of retirement to unify the historical sections of the three armed forces into what is now the Directorate of History and Heritage, to become the director of the new unit. After organizing work on the official history of the Royal Canadian Air Force, he returned to academic life at Carleton University in 1973, where he remained until his very active retirement began in 1996.

Syd was the author, co-author or editor of some 13 books. In addition to his renowned military titles, *Men in Arms* (with R.A Preston and Herman Werner, 1956) and *Canadian Airmen in the First World War: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Vol. I* (1980), the subjects were as diverse as sports, and the history of ideas. He was an inspirational teacher and leader, and a person of grace and empathy. I knew him only slightly, but benefitted from his encouragement, when still struggling in graduate school and in recent research efforts. My experience was typical of that of many students, teachers and writers, young and not-so-young.

It would be easy to say that by happy coincidence the articles in the present issue, on the confederation era, aboriginal history, and the history of a government institution, reflect Syd's interests. But those interests were so wide that would be true of virtually any selection of articles.

Cam Pulsifer, by dint of intense interest and research, has become something close to the "institutional memory" of the Canadian War Museum. The present piece on the origins of

the museum is the fruit of a larger project on the history of the museum and, particularly, its collections to whose documentation Cam has made such an outstanding contribution. In 2005 the University of New Brunswick Military and Strategic Studies Program (now the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society) enlisted the help of 4 Engineer Support Regiment at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown to clear a heavily overgrown confederation era fortification at Saint John, and record the details of the structure. It was a bitter-sweet experience. The fort proved to be in very good condition, but the whole exercise was necessary because it is on the verge of collapse into the sea as a result of coastal erosion. The team took the photographs and gathered the documentation presented in this issue expressly for publication in *Canadian Military History*. David Campbell has provided a chilling account of the little-analyzed battle of Courcellette, part of the British offensive on the Somme in 1916. His research among personal memoirs, as well as the full range of official documents, lays bare the brutality of a battle remembered mainly by the 'Vingt-Deux,' the 22nd Battalion, CEF: the heavy cost of this brilliant success required the unit largely to be rebuilt. The same was true, Campbell shows, of many of the infantry units of the 2nd Canadian Division. Whitney Lackenbauer, in the course of his well-known research on relations between First Peoples and the Canadian military, discovered the 1952 *Macleans* article reprinted here on Tommy Prince, Canada's most famous aboriginal veteran. Whitney has supplied biographical notes that provide valuable context.

Roger Sarty  
Editor-in-Chief  
May 2007

The editors of *Canadian Military History* wish to thank the following people and organizations for their contributions to this issue:

Maggie Arbour-Doucette, Brandey Barton, Michelle Fowler, Mark Humphries, Lianne Leddy, Christine Leppard, Vanessa McMackin, Susan Ross, Matt Symes, Jane Whalen, Jim Wood.

Canadian Forces Joint Imagery Centre; Canadian War Museum; Directorate of History & Heritage, Department of National Defence; Security and Defence Forum, Department of National Defence; Library and Archives Canada; Wilfrid Laurier University.

Sir,

I just finished reading Vol.15 Nos. 3 & 4, which should, perhaps, have been entitled "How the Gentlemen of the Air Force Won the War!" Several of the articles are factual and worth reading but "The Balance Sheet" by David L. Bashow, contains some problems. The worst part is the last section (p.62) entitled "Paving the Way for Operation Overlord." It contains a number of unsupportable statements such as the first sentence, "The strategic bombing campaign made possible a direct invasion of Northwest Europe in the summer of 1944." The facts are that in spite of the success of the deception scheme which kept the bulk of the best German defense troops in the Pas de Calais area (to repel an invasion from England) the Normandy defenses were manned by a force which was numerically not much smaller than the invading force, ie, a ratio of something like 1:1.5 – far less than the 1:3 or 4 theoretically required for a successful attack on a strongly-defended position. The lodgement succeeded because the German defenders were for the most part of very poor quality. Had they all been equal to the 21st Panzer Division and 352nd Division it is highly possible the invasion would not have succeeded. We did not have overwhelming superiority in numbers.

The lodgement held because of the amazing complexity German high command which prevented the several powerful German armoured divisions from attacking the bridgehead early on. These divisions (particularly 21st Panzer, 12th SS Panzer and Panzer Lehr)



were close enough to have attacked hours and even days earlier than they actually did. They were delayed in reaching the bridgehead by a number of factors, of which Air Force bombing was only a small part.

Later on during the Caen-Falaise attack in July-August 1944 the Wehrmacht was able to bring in two fresh infantry divisions (85th and 89th see Copp, *Fields of Fire*) from the Rouen area. So "destruction of the Seine bridges" did not "make effective German reinforcement virtually impossible." Two fresh German divisions of good quality would seem to me to be bloody effective – we had no fresh divisions. Again, air superiority did not "secure the flanks."

The statement that "Bomber Command dropped...5,000 tons of explosives on the defending beaches" need clarification. Few,

if any, bombs hit the beaches – they landed in the fields well back – ask any guy from the "Poor Bloody Infantry" who landed there. The beach defenses were intact and were only conquered by the courage and skill of the "poor bloody infantry" ("Brown Jobs" to the Gentlemen of the Air Force) who landed in front of them.

The climax of this section of the article is the statement by Goebbles, Hitler's Propaganda Minister. I fought as an infantry rifle platoon commander in the Regina Rifles Regiment for the last 2 months of the war and only saw the Air Force in action once (a rather ineffective rocket attack by Typhoons). The Canadian Army suffered (ie. were not afraid of) severe casualties and won many fierce engagements from June 1944 to May 1945 and were rarely, if ever, helped by bombing. The quotation from Goebbles is a direct and unacceptable insult to the Canadian (and US and British etc.) fighting men who bravely attacked and licked the enemy while suffering very severe casualties. The bombing of cities actually hindered us by making them easier to defend (ie, Caen, Cleve and Emmerich).

Despite all the help from the Air Force, Canadian infantry divisions in Northwest Europe in 1944-1945 suffered equal or greater casualty rates than in the First World War while successfully beating German army forces, which they rarely outnumbered. Despite air force bombing the Germans always had plenty of ammunition & other supplies.

J.W. Keith, Captain, Retired  
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