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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY



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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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CMH Mailbox

From the Editor-in-Chief

This year is the centennial of the Canadian Navy, established with the proclamation of the Naval Service Act on 4 May 1910. In recognition of this successful – and continuing – passage, we will be publishing items of naval interest in each of the 2010 issues. Richard Mayne has uncovered archival sources on *Galiano*, a fisheries protection vessel that carried out defence duties on the West Coast during the First World War long before she was formally transferred from the civilian Department of Marine and Fisheries to the Navy in 1917. She was later lost with all hands in a ferocious storm on 31 October 1918. Her story sheds new light on the little known history of Canadian naval defence on the Pacific coast in 1914-18 following the dramatic events immediately at the outbreak of war.

The second naval item is the product of the Ontario Heritage Trust's naval centennial project: to erect a plaque in honour of Admiral Sir Charles Kingsmill, the first director of the naval service, at Portland, Ontario, the location of his summer home and his grave site. My role was to produce a short biography that emphasized his period as professional head of the navy, but with the additional task of selecting archival documents to verify the account. It was a fascinating challenge. I am grateful to project leader Beth Anne Mendes, coordinator of the plaque program at the trust, and to Dr. Robert Davison of Wilfrid

Laurier University who carried out research on the Kingsmill family. An outside reader who assessed the material suggested it might be worth publishing because so little is known of Kingsmill. The first instalment, the biographical paper and excerpts from Kingsmill's proposal of April 1909 for development of a Canadian navy, appear in this number. We will in future issues publish other documents by Kingsmill concerning major challenges he faced.

As it happens this issue has something of a biographical theme. J.L. Granatstein's memoir features a tribute to Ezio Cappadocia, an outstanding history teacher at the Royal Military College when Jack was an officer cadet there. Ken Reynolds presents the First World War memoirs of Sergeant John Anderson Church of the 38th Battalion. This unembellished record by a soldier whose service at the front was very shortly ended by a wound and medical complications during his recovery, is one of the treasures held in the D.S.C. Mackay Collection at the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Regimental Museum. Ken also reports on his work on a history of the 38th Battalion, and in particular the rich sources he has uncovered on enlisted personnel.

Laura Brandon of the Canadian War Museum continues her sad obituary work with tributes to three recently deceased artists: Jack Nicholls (Royal Canadian Navy), Robert Hyndman (Royal Canadian Air Force), and Tom Bjarnason who participated in the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program that was launched in 1968. Suzanne Evans, a research fellow at the museum, has also explored personal stories for an

evocative account of the Silver Cross Medal, awarded each year since 1919 to the mother or widow of a Canadian service member killed in combat. The medal has taken on renewed emotional immediacy in recent years with Canadian losses in Afghanistan, and recipients are no longer limited by gender.

Matthew Walthert undertakes an analysis of Sir Arthur Currie's first major operation as commander of the Canadian Corps, the seizure of Hill 70 in August 1917. Unlike several previous accounts, the piece focuses on the initial and most important phase of the operation, to seize and hold the commanding high ground. This brilliant success was the product of Currie's meticulous planning. Hasty, poorly prepared attempts to exploit into the close and well defended confines of the city of Lens did not succeed, but these were, the article argues, secondary in scale and significance to the initial assault.

Ed Storey examines the history of badges used to identify units and key personnel, such as front line medical staff, in combat theatres. He shows that these colourful patches have a necessary function in confused combat situations. Yet, they first appeared when armies adopted drab uniforms for camouflage purposes early in the twentieth century. This fact, and the apparent appetite of front line units for unofficial and stylistically striking badges, suggests that the troops, whether on the Western Front of 1914-18, or in Afghanistan today, are inspired by a splash of colour and original design.

Roger Sarty
February 2010

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

Maggie Arbour-Doucette, Cheryl Beaupré, Robert Davison, Geoff Keelan, Kellen Kurschinski, Joseph Lenarcik, Vanessa McMackin, Beth Anne Mendes, Kathryn Rose, Susan Ross, Matt Symes, Andrew Thomson, Jane Whalen.

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

Dear sir,

I write to you in reference to the article "Making the Invisible Visible: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Military Art in the 20th & 21st Centuries" by Laura Brandon which appeared in the Summer 2009 edition of *Canadian Military History*.

Specifically, I refer to the part of the article that describes "Injured" by Gertrude Kearns and the issue of anonymity requested by the subject in the said painting. At the bottom of page 45 the article says "commissioning a portrait of a PTSD victim in which the cooperative subject chooses anonymity. In both cases, the sufferers of operational stress are keen to publicize their illness but are not keen for us to know who they are."

In the case of "Injured," I can tell you that this leaves the reader with the possible perception that the subject of the painting is either embarrassed or ashamed of his illness which is the only underlying implied explanation for wanting to retain anonymity when in fact it is not the case at all as the subject himself has been an active vocal advocate for change within the department of National Defence regarding policy and programs regarding Operational Stress Injuries (OSI) and has done hundreds of public addresses where he openly discloses the nature of his mental health illness.

While I appreciate this was likely not the intention of the author nor the intention of your publication, this may serve to reinforce existing stigma regarding mental health conditions which is something we are actively battling.

Now, let me tell you why the subject has asked for anonymity.

Firstly, when the subject accepted to be painted, he and Mrs. Kearns agreed that the painting would not depict the subject in an absolutely precise manner including physiological appearances, and no rank and or name would be associated with the painting for the sole purpose that the subject wanted every soldier with a mental illness to see themselves in the painting. Rank, regimental affiliation and name would have limited this and as a result, would not have achieved



the desired impact. At that time and for the most part still today, PTSD is not an illness that many soldiers brag or openly speak about. While LGen Roméo Dallaire has talked openly of his ordeal, it remains that in the eyes of many lower ranking soldiers, the perception is that as a very senior officer in the Canadian Forces, his coming out publically, while appreciated by many, likely has a much lower propensity to negatively impact his future simply due to his notoriety, experience, connections and status both publicly and within the government. To contrast this, the subject in the painting wanted to collaborate in the project where specific details of the "person" were not the focus but rather the human aspect of having PTSD. The issue of having no rank associated was especially important to avoid any power differential in the interpretation of the artwork.

All this to say that I believe as the OSI Special Advisor for the Canadian Forces, that it may be important in future editions to correct this aspect of your article in order to set the right tone and context to the request for anonymity and ensure that readers are not left with the impression that stigma was the underlying reason for requesting anonymity.

Respectfully,

LCol Stéphane Grenier MSC, CD
Operational Stress Injury (OSI) -
Special Advisor
Chief Military Personnel
National Defence, Ottawa, Canada

Dear sir,

I would like to comment on two articles that were published in the Autumn 2009 edition of *Canadian Military History*. The two articles in question are Tim Cook's "The Top 10 Most Important Books of Canadian Military History" and Nic Clarke's "Passchendaele Highlights Uncounted Casualties." Tim opened his article with "Historians love books" and Nic opened his with "The release of Paul Gross' film *Passchendaele* in October 2008 caused a great stir in Canada. The film is an impressive piece of film making but is not without both factual and dramatic weaknesses". In the footnotes relating to "weakness," Nic mentions that the "Film's errors of fact are minor, but nonetheless grating."

Let me first comment on the motion picture. The premier of *Passchendaele* was at the Toronto International Film Festival, followed by full release in October 2008 was pure promotional genius. October was perfect timing as the film could cash in on the sentimentality of the 11 November period, a time when most Canadians take time to acknowledge our sacrifices and when they are acutely aware of our military history. The year 2008 was also important as over 30 Canadians had been killed in combat in Afghanistan with the remains of each casualty being covered by the national media when they returned to Canada for final burial. This helped raise the awareness of the loss and grief associated with all combat fatalities.

The title of the movie used the name of a battle that the majority of Canadians associate with everything that was horrible during the Great War and the advance trailers touted the motion picture as a "Their Story is Our Story." Playing on the fact that few motion pictures with any Canadian content have ever been produced in Canada

and that Canadians were eager to grasp on to a motion picture with some sort of national significance; *Passchendaele* fit the bill. Add to this a major event in Ottawa with the cast rubbing shoulders at the Museum of Civilization with both political and military mandarins and a special showing of the movie at the Canadian base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, left the average Canadian movie-goer with the impression that this movie must be accurate as it was hosted at a national institution and given a special showing to the troops at the front. With all of the hype and support, who in Canada would not feel that the movie would inform them of a small piece of their military history and would perhaps in some way be a tribute to our largely unspoken Canadian martial prowess and perhaps even to our military casualties?

Add to this the unquestioned support of the motion picture by a national Canadian historical organization and in the string of awards in 2009 ranging from a National Arts Centre Award to a handful of Genie awards including Best Picture only to be capped off with a Pierre Burton Award for “popularizing Canadian history” only added fuel to the fire that this movie was somehow a piece of historical storytelling.

What the Canadian public and apparently some of the national advocates of preserving our Canadian history forgot was that *Passchendaele* is essentially a fictional romance story based around the period of the Passchendaele battle in late 1917. Although some of the background public-relations information relating to the motion picture claims that the movie is based on a story told to the producer, Canadian actor Paul Gross, by his Great War veteran grandfather and that the movie is based on ten years of “research”; the motion picture is very inaccurate. There are more than just “minor flaws” as some like to think, for the movie is completely riddled with technical, factual and period errors – enough to fill an article on their own. It is too bad that the movie was based on fiction rather than fact, for when it comes to Canadian military history, for the most part fact is always more exciting than fiction. This movie could well have

been the masterpiece many think it is by using the 10 years to research and weave the intricacies of true Great War stories together into a fact-based storyline rather than one made up simply to boost ticket sales.

Sadly, when *Passchendaele* was released, there were only a few veterans from the Great War still alive, none of whom were nursing sisters. I am sure that had such a flawed work of fiction been released 40 years ago touting itself as “Their Story is Our Story” in which a drug-addicted, commissioned army nursing sister carries on an intimate romance with an non-commissioned officer in and out of the trenches in 1917, that it would have been panned by the veterans as pure fantasy. Unfortunately with so few Canadian Great War veterans alive to defend themselves against such a movie, and no-one in historical circles prepared to openly criticize the movie, many Canadians took the work at face value.

How does this all tie into Tim Cook’s Top 10 books article that I mentioned at the start of this letter? Well, I have always wondered why such an influential Canadian movie like *Passchendaele* was not reviewed with a critical analysis that would have been afforded any similar book. When I posed this question to a historian in Ottawa, he told me that comparing motion pictures to books is like comparing apples to oranges; and that anyone getting into the historical book publishing business understands that critical review of the contents is part of the game where this is not the case with movies. Yet, *Passchendaele* is in a way viewed by the public as a “book” in that it is still supported by the same national Canadian historical organization, and that institution still regularly distributes copies of the movie to educators and students and the motion picture is shown to Canadian students as part of their study of the Great War. This movie has even started to seep into academic circles for as we see, Nic Clarke uses it in his *CMH* article. The 114 minute running time of *Passchendaele* is potentially more damaging to Canadians’ impression of the Great War than any commercially available history book, for the medium

of film can leave people believing in what they have seen and experienced. This is especially so when it is hyped as history and no-one speaks out against it. The power of this type of medium cannot be understated for it was in the early 1990s that the CBC documentary series the “Valour and the Horror” caused some fierce historical debate and legal action in Canada against the producers for their premises concerning the RCAF’s strategic bombing campaign. One of the concerns nearly 20 years ago was that this potentially flawed and inaccurate material presented in the documentary would be used to teach Second World War history in the classrooms. Another example of the power of film is that on the night I saw *Passchendaele*, the theatre was full, with well over a hundred people. I would be hard pressed ever to find 100 people lining up at a bookstore at 10 pm at night to spend their money on any contemporary history of the Canadian Army at Passchendaele.

Like books, motion pictures all have something to say. For the most part military movies are based on some form of historical event and some purport to recreate an event while others use it as the backdrop to the story. A movie can be as influential as a book and as I have been told on many an occasion, some people believe that once viewing a motion picture some of the audience may be so influenced as to do some research or read up on the events covered in the movie. To be honest, I doubt many, if any, of the people in the theatre with me left *Passchendaele* inspired enough to purchase a book. However, I would be curious to know what the ten historians in Tim’s article would list as their 10 favourite military movies. Obviously the list cannot be limited to Canadian movies, but I would be interested to know which ten movies they would watch, perhaps repeatedly and more importantly why the movies made the list.

Ed Storey
Nepean, ON