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Thirty Years in the Trenches

A Military Historian's Report on the War Between Teaching and Research

J.L. Granatstein

Ezio Cappadocia was my teacher from 1959 to 1961 at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario. RMC had begun to give degrees only in 1959 (my sometime co-author Desmond Morton received the first one), but it had strength in engineering, history, political science, economics and English. It was a college with a specialized purpose, namely producing officers for the army, navy, and air force, but there was a recognition that the quality of the new degree, and hence of the regard in which it would be held, depended on the reputation of the teaching staff in the broader scholarly community. That meant their research had to be known.

I had arrived at RMC from three years at Le Collège Militaire Royal de St. Jean, which then fed all its students to Kingston, intending to take a degree in Political Science and Economics, but I quickly discovered that economics was beyond me. I gravitated instead to history, a wise choice. The History Department at RMC was tiny, but very fine indeed. George F.G. Stanley was the chair, but he was on sabbatical leave when I arrived. The key figure was Richard Preston, and under him were Donald Schurman, Fred Thompson, and Ezio. They were all different but all very capable, and I did most of my work, including a hugely long undergraduate thesis on the early

history of Canadian peacekeeping operations, for Preston. Preston taught me to love research, and I turned out to be a good scrounger, able to get access to hitherto closed records. I have lived off that knack ever since.

Ezio taught American and European history, and I have not a single recollection of a specific lecture that I heard him deliver. What I do remember was his enthusiastic lecturing style, his short, stocky body flying around the classroom as he gesticulated at us or scribbled on the board. I had never had a lecturer like him before. At CMR, I had literally slept through most of the history lectures I took. It was impossible to sleep in Ezio's classes – there was so much noise from the lectern, so many ideas being tossed out, so much going on. It was simply wonderful, the first time that history was fun.

The barriers of discipline and rank at RMC were so great at the beginning of the 1960s that it was impossible for a cadet to be a friend of a professor. But I was closer to Cappadocia than to Dick Preston, my supervisor, and I loved that he was so overtly unmilitary and discreetly anti-military. An RMC professor then would not have criticized the Canadian military in class or even privately in discussion with a cadet, but I was sure that Cappadocia thought that I was in the wrong place, heading in the wrong direction if I

intended a career in the Canadian Army. Of course, he was right. And when the army let me go to the University of Toronto in the autumn of 1961 to do my Master's degree in history, I realized how right he was.

A few years later, still in the army and working off my obligatory three-year period of service, I was applying to do Ph.D. work at a number of American graduate schools. I had come out of RMC infatuated with American history, likely because Ezio had taught the subject, and I wanted to do my dissertation on some aspect of Franklin Roosevelt's career. Cappadocia and Preston were my main RMC referees and I talked with the two of them. Ezio was still in Kingston and I still remember going to see him over lunch and his dissuading me from doing U.S. history and especially Roosevelt. There was already too much on FDR, he said, something surely incorrect in 1963. Where he was right, however, was in saying that there was much too little work yet done on Canadian history and that this was where I should do my dissertation. Being an obedient fellow, that conversation pushed me toward Duke University which had a Commonwealth Studies Centre and where a number of historians and political scientists knew something of Canada. I have been grateful to Ezio ever since.

By 1966, I was out of the army and on the faculty of York University. My dissertation, finished in the fall of 1966, was on the Conservative

This paper was written for a festschrift to honour the late Ezio Cappadocia who taught at the Royal Military College and McMaster University. The volume unfortunately did not proceed.

Party in the Second World War, a good Canadian political history topic. I had written a paper on this subject in Jack Saywell's political history seminar at the University of Toronto, and Saywell was now the Dean of Arts and Science at the new York University. The university then had a campus at Glendon College in the north of Toronto and was constructing a campus in the far northwestern reaches of the city. There was already much history behind the new institution, many divisions over the direction it should go, and much bad blood between faculty and administration. I knew nothing of this in my first year as a professor as I scrambled to prepare courses in Canadian, American, and Commonwealth history.

I modelled myself on the good teachers I had had. Because I had had full scholarships as an M.A. and Ph.D. student, I had never given a lecture or taught a tutorial, so I looked for exemplars to those whose teaching I had enjoyed. Jack Saywell at Toronto had run the best seminar I had ever had, offering new and challenging interpretations of post-Confederation Canada, and William Hamilton at Duke had devastatingly effective methods of making the graduate students appraise the work of their peers. I emulated both. There was no doubt to whom I looked as a model for my lectures. Cappodocia had been the finest lecturer I had heard, and while I couldn't muster the same degree of total enthusiasm for my subjects as he did, I tried. I shouted, waved my arms, and threw chalk at the students who dozed. I looked for anecdotes and stories, and I deliberately and consciously sought parallels to the past in current events. It was pretty rough at the start, but I learned and improved. I like to think that I became a better than average teacher and lecturer in a few years.

At the same time, I was trying to publish. No one told me I had to do so; no one said I should not – at

the outset. I simply assumed that professors published, and I had done so much research for my dissertation that it would have been a crime to waste it. The book, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945*, came out with the University of Toronto Press in 1967.

By then I had gone to York's main campus. Saywell had told me I could stay at Glendon, which was to remain a geographically separate and small college, or go to the muddy wastes of Keele and Finch where there would eventually be masses of students, both undergraduates and graduates. He was going north, so I did too, making a fateful choice without thinking much about it. Glendon eventually solidified into a "teaching" institution, a bilingual college that to my mind, at least, would never amount to very much. The University's main campus had the chance of doing great things as a major research institution.

And at the beginning it seemed to be full of promise as a teaching institution as well. The students were superb, those I had in the next five years simply the best I have ever taught. I used the Duke seminar techniques Bill Hamilton had taught me, and the kids travelled to Ottawa to do research in the National Archives and wrote fifty page primary source papers that they defended and attacked brilliantly. It was simply amazing, and when students went on to graduate school and published their papers, I felt exactly as Cappodocia did when I moved forward. If this was what teaching could be like, I understood why Ezio had loved it. But I also wanted to do research and to write.

I hope I have suggested that I am – or was – a bit of a naïf. I went off to Duke because Ezio told me so, and I left Glendon because Jack Saywell suggested the main campus might be fun. And, as I have said, I simply assumed that all professors published. I think

I knew that Cappodocia wasn't a major publisher, but I never had the slightest doubt that he was a scholar and that he understood and respected research and scholarship.

But at York in the late 1960s, I came to realize for the first time that there were academics who thought research and scholarship were a waste of time that diverted a faculty member's attention from the important work of teaching, administration, and serving on committees. I can still remember when this realization hit me. I was talking to Sydney Eisen, a British historian who had come to York and back to his native Toronto from a teaching career in the United States. It must have been early 1968 because my book had been out for only a few months, and he was not yet the chair of the department. Eisen said to me, "Well, you've proved you can do it. So now you don't have to publish anymore." I was stunned at this, not least because I had spent the last summer doing archival research in Ottawa, was publishing academic articles and starting to get opinion pieces into the media, and was already well underway on my next book. Eisen was a senior figure in the new and growing department and in the university, and we were friendly. So, still being a good soldier, I didn't bite his head off. But neither did I salute and march away. I told him that I was doing research and intended to keep on publishing. He looked at me as if I'd thrown up on his shoes. The long process of losing my academic innocence had begun.

My next shock came in 1970 when I went up for tenure and promotion to associate professor. York at that time had few rules or regulations in this area, a university-wide committee simply deciding who to recommend to the President. The former chair of the History Department, Lewis Hertzman, was on the committee, and I was turned down for tenure because, I learned several years later

from the secretary of the committee, I "had published too much". The reason in truth was that Hertzman and I had had a long-running dispute over the role of students in the department's business. My fourth-year seminar students had been leading the revolution, and I had supported them. It was the late 1960s, after all. But what was interesting was Hertzman's rationale: I had published too much. I started looking elsewhere for employment but, on appeal, received tenure a few months after the blockade was cracked.

As I later discovered, there was a *de facto* double jeopardy system in effect at York. If you did not publish, the assumption was that you were a good teacher or good administrator and, therefore, deserving of tenure and promotion. If you published, by definition you were less likely to be a good teacher or committee member and, moreover, the quality of your scholarship had to be closely appraised. Not that anyone on the tenure and promotion committee in those casual days had either read my work or had it appraised by outside referees.

I had my future at stake here, and I was no unbiased observer. But I thought this raising of teachers over scholars was nonsense. There was no separation of the two roles in my mind. The History Department at York had attracted some absolutely first-rate scholars such as Ramsay Cook, John Boshier, Gabriel Kolko, and Jerome Chen, most of whom, as far as I could tell, had a good reputation in the classroom and certainly seemed to do their share of the burdensome work of committees. What hurt the department in my view was that its efforts to build its reputation – all the new universities in Canada were seen as upstart institutions and York, located in the same city as the "national university," the University of Toronto, was especially so – had been hampered by the number of "anti-publishing" faculty who had

been brought aboard. It was, of course, hard to recruit first-class faculty in a period of rapid national expansion, and Jack Saywell's York had, by and large, done exceptionally well. But there were aberrations, a deliberate effort, or so I thought, by some in the History Department to replicate themselves and their approach to the proper role of faculty. (I have not forgotten a History hiring committee some years later where unpublished faculty members grilled a well-published candidate and turned him down for a job over my objections. His several books and many articles were "too traditional," they decided.)

The tenure rules soon were codified at York, and a rigid three-track system devised. Scholarship, teaching and service were the routes upward, and the gradings were labelled as excellence, high competence, and competence. Three ratings of high competence were enough for promotion and/or tenure. Excellence in research could get one tenure and promotion but only if there was at least competence in the other two areas. This was fair. But excellence in teaching required only competence in scholarship and service and, as I discovered when I sat on the Faculty of Arts tenure and promotion committee (with Sydney Eisen as Dean running the committee), the definition of competence in scholarship was rather more flexible than it was in teaching. Faculty members' creativity in drafting their curriculum vitae was unbounded, and a non-publishing scholar could get his satisfactory grade with a book review, a talk to a service club, or a great and unfunded research project on which he had been working for years and might, someday, publish. At the same time, he still was assumed to be a great teacher and/or a great committee person for if he did not publish, he must be. A great scholar, on the other hand, had her published works

dissected line by line, often by those who had not published much or at all, her teaching record scrutinized very closely, and her membership on and attendance at committees pored over. Double jeopardy still ruled. It took many years to have defensible standards prevail in the History Department, if not at York as a whole. Those eventual departmental standards took both teaching **and** scholarship very seriously, as they should, as they must.

Soon the unionization of faculty entered the York picture, a process in which I played a major role. In 1974, the small pool of merit pay money for History had been unilaterally awarded by the department chairman to those who were the lowest paid. I believed that I was entitled to merit pay that year (every year, in fact!) and thought that one's salary should have nothing to do with how merit was awarded. I appealed my exclusion to the chair and was turned down; I went to the Dean and the President with a similar result. I then used the existing grievance procedures which followed precisely the same route up the food chain and was turned down once more. By this time I was furious and ran for president of the York University Faculty Association. In a matter of months, and not because of History's merit pay allocation procedures, we were involved in a long process of seeking certification, collective bargaining, and strife. The university had more than its share of troubles, the administration was less than competent, and the wellsprings of faculty resentment at weak administrative procedures flowed very freely.

What was striking in the present context was the attitudinal split in the university. While there were many exceptions, the good scholars tended to shy away from unionization and the junior and the weaker supported it. I counted myself a strong scholar, and I brought along some of my well-published colleagues to support

unionization, but it was an uphill struggle. I discovered yet again that publishing scholars were simply despised by those whose interests lay elsewhere – I cannot forget one member of the YUFA bargaining committee, a Glendon College assistant professor of English, saying precisely that. My purpose in supporting unionization was to see a rules-based employment relationship and to end sweetheart deals. I could not conceive of strikes and said this repeatedly in meeting after meeting. The resulting contract achieved what I had hoped for, but the union, as I discovered to my regret within a few years, could only run well if the best faculty took an interest in it. They did not. The most productive people at the university wanted to do research and write books, not bargain over the amendment of clause 96(2)(b), and the tenured assistant professors, the lifetime associates, and the Marxists who thought the university was only another shop floor assumed control of the faculty union. The strikes duly followed, poisoning the work relationship at York.

And merit pay, the reason I had plunged into the mess? The union turned out, not surprisingly, to support the view that the university's professorial workers should get the same raises. Some departments actually passed resolutions giving everyone the same merit pay allocation. The administration presumably decided not to stir the pot and either went along with the union or reduced the money going to merit pay to trifling sums in contract after contract. My unhappy experiment with labour relations led me to concentrate on my research and to focus on my department. A naïf at the beginning, I remained one to the end.

In the History Department itself, the struggle for control of the future hinged on a second year course in historiography. First-year courses at York were "Gen Ed", a hopelessly

inadequate mishmash of general education courses that all students took. Not until the second year did undergraduates go to their major departments, and the department in its wisdom had decided that a course in historiography should be compulsory for all History majors. This course had become the property of the anti-publishing wing, and it aroused the ire of the rest in ways that now seem hard to credit. I don't think any of the publishing historians objected to historiography as such, only to the compulsion involved and to the fact that symbolically this course suggested that the anti-scholarship wing's hold on the department remained unassailable. Certainly, this issue upset me, not least because this was the only compulsory course in the department when I, as a good Canadian nationalist in a period of very strong Canadianism in the universities, thought that every undergraduate should be obliged to take a course in Canadian history. This was sharply and successfully opposed by the historiography faction (and some others) which was, like many York faculty at the time, heavily American-born.

It took years to end the compulsory historiography course, but when it did the power in the department shifted for the better. Hiring now was more often conducted to seek out good scholars, and promotions became heavily biased toward publishing scholars. There would no longer be full professors with blank curriculum vitae holding key administrative posts in the department or teaching graduate students. It was, I think, no coincidence that the History Department came to be recognized as a "power" department in the university and, by the early 1980s, as the best in the country. Certainly York's Canadianists were unchallenged. The best group of Canadian historians ever, or so Jack Saywell later described a cadre that included Ramsay Cook, Fernand

Ouellet, Viv Nelles, Chris Armstrong, Peter Oliver, Irving Abella, Michiel Horn, and Saywell himself

But what was "good" history? When I had started teaching in 1966, there had been no divisions here. Good history was soundly researched and well written, plain and simple. But by the 1970s, ideology had begun to creep into Canadian history on its hobnailed and steel-toed boots, initially in labour history. Were you a Marxist (almost the norm)? Were you writing about the workers (which was good)? Or the union institutions (which was evil)? Soon, stories of conferences that had turned into denunciatory bloodbaths began to circulate, journals denied space to those on the wrong side of the ideological divide, and historians began to switch fields, leaving Canadian labour history to the ideologues and seeking friendlier terrain in foreign policy or military history. I was a political historian working on the Great and Second World Wars and largely oblivious to all this, but I ought to have paid more attention.

Before long, I came to realize that no matter how much I published or how good it might have been, I was doing the wrong kind of history. I remember a social historian friend saying that mine was the only political history he read. I remember others pronouncing what I did as old-fashioned, irrelevant, out-of-date. Social history was in, and I was out. "It's a war," labour historian-turned-military historian Terry Copp of Wilfrid Laurier University said to me, "and we're losing."

He was right, but I nonetheless found this puzzling. Students still seemed more interested by and large in the "old" history than in the "new", as enrolments all across the nation testified. Copp's classes, for example, had waiting lists, and he had more graduate students than everyone else in his department added together. The young wanted

to hear about military history, or Canadian-American relations, or the rise and fall of Canadian political leaders. Those were the areas I taught, those were the areas I wrote about as my interests changed and re-focussed, and it was startling to hear historians at York and elsewhere dismiss those subjects as boring, old hat, and unimportant. How could any Canadian pronounce the nation's role in the Second World War of no interest or suggest that Canada's relations with its superpower neighbour didn't matter? How could it be that a strike in 1943 was of interest but Prime Minister Mackenzie King's efforts to control the pressures for conscription in World War II were not? How was it that work on the maltreatment of women was path-breaking, while studies of Canada's dollar crisis in 1947-48 or of the abortive free trade negotiations of 1948 with the United States were boring? I didn't object to those who worked on social history topics, so why should they trash me? My focus in the university had been on the differences between those who published and those who did not, but suddenly that had been overridden by the division between the old and the new in Canadian history.

So powerful was this trend that I suddenly realized that political history, broadly defined as politics, military history, foreign policy, and public policy, or what I called national history, was on the verge of disappearing in the university, as older faculty retired and were replaced by the trendy young. Similar things were happening in the high schools. The new Canadian reality of multiculturalism changed the way high school history was taught, where it was still taught at all, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms seemed to require little case studies to demonstrate how beastly Canadians had been in the dark ages before 1982. History by snippet, history by object lesson, was the new rule, and the memory of a past to which Canadians,

native-born or immigrants, could relate was fast disappearing. This made me uncomfortable and not simply because my own relevance to my subject of Canadian history was in question. I believed then, and believe still, that Canadians need to understand their national and their local history, their political and their social history. The ideas and concerns that were to become *Who Killed Canadian History?* (1998) had started to percolate.

By the 1980s, curiously, I found that the "old hat" and "conservative" work I did was increasingly of interest to the media, and I spent substantial time doing newspaper interviews and radio and television work. This, I quickly discovered, upset some of my colleagues, and soon I heard accusations to my face that I was both publishing so much and doing so much media that I had to be ignoring my students. I wasn't, and not one single student ever complained that I was, but the unfounded complaints were still hurled at me. I took my teaching seriously until the day I left York in 1995, but I will admit that I found that the quality of both undergraduate and graduate students had deteriorated in the years since 1966 – and that the decline had accelerated over time. My guesstimate was that academic standards fell by at least a third between the late 60s and the mid-90s.

My own research continued. I had continued my focus on the world wars, looking at politics, foreign policy, economic policy, the bureaucracy, and the web of interrelationships between Canada, the United States and Britain. But increasingly I found myself drawn to military history. In 1984, the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, I did a popular treatment of the Canadian role in the great invasion with another of Cappodocia's former students, Desmond Morton. This was a great success, and we followed it with books on Canada's role in the Great

War and in World War II. I soon turned my interest to a collective biography of Canadian Second World War senior officers, published as *The Generals* in 1993. Then I did some work for the Department of National Defence as a commissioner on the Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Canadian Forces Reserves. I was soon a consultant to the Minister of National Defence on the future of the Canadian Forces, and I began to consider writing a one-volume history of Canada's Army, eventually published in 2002.

By the beginning of the 1990s, by then in my early fifties, I had begun to look for a way out of the university. The chance came in 1995 when York University offered a modest buyout for faculty over 55 years of age, and I seized the opportunity. At 56, I was free, out of the university life for good and out of York completely. I also took my pension out of the university after discovering an error of approximately 5 percent in the university's calculation of my entitlement. No explanation or apology was ever offered. I quickly discovered that retirement meant that my income rose, my stress level declined, and my time became my own. Thirty wearying years was long enough, and the task of participating in the doomed counterattacks against the entrenched opponents of scholarship, sound history, and standards now belonged to others.

For me, the fighting was over and, as far as I was concerned, I had won. What did you do in the French Revolution?, Talleyrand was supposed to have been asked. "I survived," he replied. Me, too.

Jack Granatstein taught history for 30 years, is a Senior Research Fellow of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, was Director and CEO of the Canadian War Museum, and writes on Canadian military history, foreign and defence policy, and politics. Among his publications are *Canada's War*, *Canada's Army*, *Who Killed the Canadian Military*, *Whose War Is It?*, and *Who Killed Canadian History?*