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Documenting the D-Day Dodgers

Canadian Field Historians in the Italian Campaign, 1943-1945

Christine Leppard

The research for the operational volumes of the official history of the Canadian Army in the Second World War was gathered by two under-staffed and over-worked field historical units. They were organized and trained by Lieutenant-Colonel C.P. Stacey, the official historian of the overseas army, who was based at Canadian Military Headquarters in London. Stacey exercised close direction over the units through liaison visits, messages and frequent letters. The mission of the 1st Canadian Field Historical Section (1 CFHS), which served in Italy from November 1943 to February 1945, was to gather “top-down” documents for the official record. Closer examination of their work shows that 1 CFHS was also recording a “worm’s eye” view of the war through art and the pages of the historians’ war diaries. In doing so, field historians Captain Eric Harrison and Captain Sam H. Hughes developed valuable analyses of Canadian military operations. Secondly, they made a valuable contribution to our understanding of civil affairs in Italy, and the social history of the “D-Day Dodgers.”

Stacey arrived in London at the end of 1940 with a mandate to document the Canadian Army’s overseas war. He was the right man for the job. A professor at Princeton University, a former officer in the

Abstract: The “top-down” official record of Canada in the Italian Campaign of the Second World War was gathered by the 1st Canadian Field Historical Section (1 CFHS), which served in Italy from 1943 to 1945. Close study of 1 CFHS records indicates that it was also documenting a “worm’s eye” view of the campaign through a war art program and in the historians’ war diaries. Historians Captain Eric Harrison and Captain Sam H.S. Hughes offered preliminary analyses on important campaign questions, and, along with war artists Captain Charles Comfort and Lieutenant Lawren P. Harris, provided material for future scholarship on the social history of Canada in the Italian campaign.

Canadian militia, and one of only two Canadian university historians who specialized in military history, Stacey was prolific and committed. Still the job became too big for one man, no matter how industrious, as the overseas force grew by 1942 into the First Canadian Army comprising two corps with a total of five divisions.¹ Even so, Stacey had a difficult time persuading his superiors that a second historian was needed. For a time it appeared that Gerald S. Graham, of Queen’s University, whose recent work had taken him into naval and military history, might be available, but he joined the navy. George Stanley, the only Canadian

historian other than Stacey to have focussed on military history in his graduate studies and publications, initially refused Stacey’s invitation, but then later accepted. Stanley, who was serving in an infantry battalion in Canada when Stacey contacted him, was a graduate of Oxford University, and in civilian life had been a professor of history at Mount Allison University.² Stanley finally arrived in London only in October 1942.

Canadian troops had stood on guard in England, a vital role in 1940 and the first part of 1941 when a German invasion had been a real possibility. Thereafter the Canadians’ main purpose had been to prepare for an Allied return to Europe, but strategic circumstances repeatedly delayed that major operation. When, in August 1942 a large Canadian force built around the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division (CID) carried out a raid on the French port of Dieppe, Stacey learned the hard way that when Canadian units went into action historians needed to go with them. Stacey was not warned of the raid and was on leave in August – his first holiday in the nearly two years he had been at CMHQ, London. The Dieppe operation was an unmitigated debacle that cost the 2nd CID 3,367 casualties. Stacey scrambled to collect all of the information that he



Colonel C.P. Stacey, the official historian of the overseas Canadian army, was responsible for setting up the field historical sections. He exercised close direction over the units through liaison visits, messages and frequent letters.

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could including first-hand accounts from Canadian officers and soldiers who returned to England. Such an after-the-fact effort involved many compromises, and the lessons were not lost on Stacey. He had to have advanced notice of future operations, and historians had to be attached to formations in the field so they could immediately gather and collate documents, and interview officers as soon as possible after combat actions before the passage of time blurred memories.³

There was precedent for this work. During the First World War, the ambitious Canadian businessman, member of the British Parliament, and socialite, Max Aitken, was Canada's "Eye Witness" of the war. As self-appointed historian of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Aitken travelled

behind the front interviewing soldiers for accounts he rushed into print in newspapers to promote the Canadian effort. He drew on this material to publish one of the first monographs about Canada's part in the war effort, *Canada in Flanders*, which became an instant best seller when it appeared in 1916.⁴

During the Second World War, the Americans also employed field historians. The idea originated with the Harvard maritime historian Samuel Eliot Morison, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of a book about Christopher Columbus.⁵ To better appreciate the difficulties of Columbus's voyage, Morison sailed the explorer's route across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1942 he pitched the same concept to the United States Navy, arguing that he could write a better

history of the war if he went to sea.⁶ After lobbying President Roosevelt, who was a vocal proponent of a comprehensive history, Morison set sail. Ultimately his work was essential in convincing the US Army Historical Branch that battle reports, war dairies and message logs inadequately depicted what happened on the battlefield.⁷ Trained historians were made "combat historians" and sent overseas to interview rank and file soldiers. These interviews featured prominently in the *American Forces in Action* pamphlet series that began publication in 1943. The initiative for the series had come directly from General George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the US Army, who particularly wanted to have the pamphlets distributed in military hospitals "to help [wounded soldiers] understand why their sacrifices were necessary."⁸

The British, according to Stacey, "scorned" the idea of placing historians in the field to conduct interviews. Instead, they preferred to keep their historical work in the Cabinet Office, relying on war diaries to construct the chronology. They did, however, coordinate a widespread effort to gather documents for archival keeping, and made extensive preparations for their official history while the war was still on.⁹

Stacey did not have the manpower to employ "combat historians" the way the Americans did, but in October 1942 the Canadian Army agreed that one historical officer should be attached to each headquarters in the field. Stacey had hoped to send Sam H.S. Hughes to gather documents and conduct interviews with 1st Division when

it participated in the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. Hughes, the grandson of the infamous First World War minister of militia, Sir Sam Hughes, was an Oxford-trained historian in modern European history. When the war broke out in 1939, Hughes was embarking on a law career at Osgoode Hall. He joined the Canadian Officers' Training Corps and later the Queen's Own Rifles, and, after completing two of three years of law school, the future Ontario Supreme Court judge went overseas. In June 1942, he was appointed to Operations and Intelligence at CMHQ, in an office located next door to Stacey. Upon finding out that the Canadians were to be sent to the Mediterranean theatre, Stacey asked Hughes if would like the job as historical officer. Although Hughes immediately agreed, it was not to be.¹⁰ Instead, the job went to Captain A.T. Sesia, an intelligence officer in 1st Division. The idea of giving an historian – an outsider to the family of the combat formation's staff – extraordinary access to the inner sanctum of planning, administration and operations was a new concept, and clearly the division's general staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel George Kitching, preferred that such a sensitive mission should be carried out by one of his own officers. With Sesia went war artist Lieutenant Will Ogilvie, recruited by Canadian High Commissioner Vincent Massey, who since 1939 had pressed tirelessly for an art program, inspired by the one set up by Beaverbrook in

the First World War, to record the Canadian effort. With the help and support of Stacey, Massey established a formal army art program that was administered by the historical section.¹¹

Although not a trained historian, Sesia proved effective in recording 1st Division's operations in Sicily in July-August 1943, and his efforts have been well documented elsewhere.¹² Most importantly, Sesia was an ambassador for the historical section among 1st Division officers. At the same time he was able to provide information and advice from which Stacey "codified" a set of instructions to "clarify things generally" and assist future field historians "in [their] relationships both with formation headquarters and with other historical officers in the theatre, whose work [they had] the task of co-ordinating."¹³ The efforts of Ogilvie later prompted Stacey to write, "I know of no other pictorial record of a campaign anywhere to match the one Ogilvie made in Sicily."¹⁴ Sesia and Ogilvie had done important work.

By the end of the Sicilian campaign, the Allies decided that they would maintain pressure on the Germans retreating to Italy, by crossing the straits of Messina and assaulting the beaches at Salerno

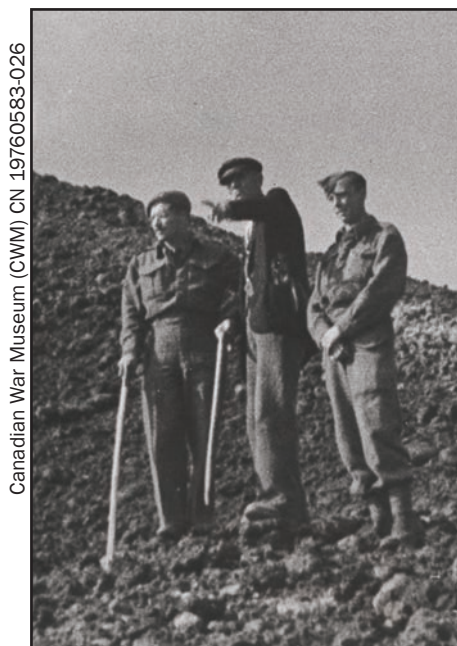
in September. In Italy, at places like Ortona and the Hitler Line, the Canadians waged some of their toughest battles of the war.

Two months into the campaign the Canadian presence in Italy expanded, with the dispatch from the United Kingdom of I Canadian Corps headquarters and 5th Canadian Armoured Division (CAD). The size of the field historical section grew accordingly. Eric Harrison was sent to Italy in command of 1 CFHS which was responsible for documenting the actions of I Corps. Harrison was a history professor at Queen's University, and he was not a military historian.¹⁵ Like Sam Hughes and most Canadian historians of the day, they studied constitutional, economic and social political history.¹⁶

In autumn 1943, having earned much-needed respect for the field historians among the combat formations, Sesia was relieved by Hughes, who, under Harrison's command, took over the responsibility for gathering documents from 1st Division. Ogilvie had come down with malaria in Sicily, so he was relieved by Captain Charles Comfort, an art history professor from Toronto. Comfort was joined by Lieutenant Lawren P. Harris, son of the Group

Right: Captain A.T. Sesia (left, shown here visiting Mount Vesuvius with a guide and Private Heaton) was the first historian assigned to First Canadian Infantry Division for the Sicilian Campaign.

Far right: Captain S.H.S. Hughes by Charles Comfort. Hughes was Stacey's first choice to accompany 1st Division to Sicily. Hughes did take over from Sesia when the fighting moved to the Italian mainland.



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William Abernathy Ogilvie – Company Headquarters, 1943.

Ogilvie's paintings in Sicily as the official war artist prompted C.P. Stacey to write: "I know of no other pictorial record of a campaign anywhere to match the one Ogilvie made in Sicily."

of Seven painter and a noted artist in his own right.

Assembling comprehensive "top-down" documentation of the war was the historians' primary objective in Italy. In an era when historical practice was still profoundly influenced by Leopold von Ranke's "scientific" approach, this meant paying assiduous attention to "the facts." Stacey directed 1 CFHS to get "the raw material clearly and accurately on paper, send it to [CMHQ]," where the final job of writing narratives would be done.¹⁷ Arguably their most important, and certainly their most frustrating assignment was to oversee the writing of war diaries by unit

intelligence officers, most of whom were utterly unschooled in historical practices. They were also instructed to collect communications from among Canadian units, and with higher level British and Allied headquarters in Italy, so that historians would be able to contextualize Canadian operations. Finally, these records were to be supplemented by interviews with Canadian officers.¹⁸

Although the ultimate purpose was to provide material for the published official histories of the army, there were immediate needs. Operational lessons documented by the field historians were collated into "Extracts from War Diaries and

Memoranda" by Stacey's office in London and provided to Canadian units training for the eventual assault on Northwest Europe.¹⁹ Stacey also drew on the whole body of his correspondence with Harrison and the latter's reports so that the 2nd Canadian Field Historical Section that would accompany the Canadians to France would benefit from the experiences in Italy.

Tim Cook, in *Clio's Warriors*, observed that "these historians [were] essentially schooled to place value on 'great men and great events' rather than in social history from the ground up, it is unfortunate, if understandable, that a valuable

opportunity was lost in failing to record the private's view of the war."²⁰ It was as much a practical as a philosophical issue, as the systematic, large-scale recording necessary to capture soldiers' perspectives was far beyond the limited resources available to Stacey.

Yet, Stacey and 1 CFHS did not ignore the view from the slit-trench in favour of the perspective from headquarters. One of the fundamental purposes – and achievements – of the war art program was to capture the experience of the front lines. As Harrison later put it "Comfort's mission... [was] as a soldiering artist."²¹ Since the artists were contributing to the historical record, they were subject to the same standards of precision and accuracy that Stacey applied to Harrison and Hughes. The ever-watchful history chief, for example, advised Comfort and Harris' successors in Italy, MacDonald and Tinning, to reconsider their subject matter, as he felt they put too much emphasis on landscape scenes and not enough on Canadian troops. Without exposing themselves to much danger, they somehow needed to get closer to operational subjects.²²

Comfort, in Harrison's view, set the standard for war art. "He [was] acutely aware of both the immediate and the long-term importance of the work he [was] doing and [was] therefore the more concerned with the fact that his production [had] been cut down by about half as a

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Top: Charles Comfort – Via Dolorosa. Eric McGeer commented that this painting of "the road of sorrows" is a "hellish depiction of the fighting and remains the defining image of the Battle of Ortona."

Right: Charles Comfort working on a painting in Italy, March 1944.

Far right: Lawren P. Harris paints beside the wreckage of a German PzKpfW IV tank, Italy, March 1944.



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Members of the 1st Canadian Field Historical Section set up a camp in Italy next to their Humber. From left to right: Captain Charles Comfort, Private Heaton, Lieutenant William Ogilvie and Captain A.T. Sesia.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stacey poses with members of his staff in England: from left to right: William Ogilvie, O.N. Fisher, Captain Heathcote, L. Wrinch, Stacey, Lieutenant Engler, Major A.T. Sesia, G.C. Pepper, Captain G.R. Martin



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result of the conditions under which it [had] to be carried on.”²³ The winter months were cold and rainy – conditions not particularly conducive to sketching, watercolour or oil paintings. Yet, Comfort persevered to paint with “complete objectivity,” projecting onto the canvas “what he [saw], directly, without elaboration, and, as it were, without comment.” In December 1943, he even followed on the heels of the 2nd Brigade as it waged a bloody battle to push the 1st German Parachute Division from Ortona, the easternmost anchor on the Germans’ winter defensive line. Comfort sketched the scene before

the battle had completely ended, an initiative that Harrison strongly commended “from the historian’s point of view.”²⁴

Through the war art program, the historical section created a history of the campaign that did more than complement and supplement the written, photographic and cartographic record.²⁵ Massey and Stacey were determined to display the works as quickly as possible, and made considerable efforts to mount exhibitions in England and in Canada during and immediately after the war. While there was certainly a propaganda element to these shows,

Stacey’s primary purpose was to bring out the “personal history”²⁶ of the Canadian Army’s effort, something quite different from the top-down record of policy, training and operations whose construction was the historians’ primary mission. The art was consciously directed toward an audience much broader than those who would be most interested in the documentary record.

At the same time, Stacey made further efforts to capture a wider picture of the war by having the field historians record their own observations for inclusion in the 1 CFHS war diary. Each historian, Stacey directed, should provide “a useful commentary upon which he himself sees of the campaign.”²⁷ Harrison in particular recorded more than his daily administrative duties, and captured the sights, sounds and smells of living and working in a war zone. He included reports of interviews he undertook informally with rank and file soldiers. The thoroughness of Harrison’s diary in part reflected the fact that, unlike many of the staff officers whom he trained to write operational war diaries – a task he once referred to as “missionary work among the heathen” – he was comfortable with the pen.²⁸ Yet he and Hughes also repeatedly proved aware that they were establishing an entire field of history for generations of historians, not just laying the ground work for an operational official history, by documenting a history of the campaign that went beyond

the movements of companies and battalions. Indeed, three themes are prominent in the historians' diaries: the fate of Italian towns and countryside, the attitudes of Italian citizens and their interactions with the Allies, and impressions of the daily lives of Canadian soldiers in the front lines.

The beating taken by Italian cities and the squalid living conditions that resulted for the inhabitants never ceased to move Harrison. Upon reaching Catania on 11 November 1943, he observed the heavy toll of the Allied bombardment, particularly on the waterfront buildings, and the "pervasive dirt and stink." Inflated prices and food shortages plagued hungry Italians because of the "successive occupations by the Germans and the British having apparently greatly diminished stocks which under conditions could not be replenished."²⁹ Particularly

wrenching was the fate of the Roman Basilica in Rocca, which he saw in February 1944:

The church and the cloisters had been hit by gun-fire, but the gaunt structure itself remained, still a landmark above the ADRIATIC and the valley of the SANGRO, as it had been since its foundation in the 8th century. In the crypt were frescoes with figures done in the transitional manner of Cimabue: their early-renaissance faces looked down with faint surprise on the soldiers of 5 [CAD]...who were using the crypt as their mess.³⁰

Still grimmer were Harrison's descriptions of Monte Cassino, which he visited in mid-May, a month after it was levelled by American bombers. He was again mesmerized by the total destruction of the ancient architecture, although the human toll

captured his attention just as strongly. "Unburied corpses, their limbs fantastically deployed, still lay where they had fallen, looking like waxen dummies, dusty, bloated, exuding aft, their necks lolling, their hair like dried-out grass, their features gray, remote, unhuman."³¹ Harrison's poignant descriptions of the carnage of war were perhaps cathartic for him, and he certainly understood this part of his reporting as being essential for future historians.

Harrison was especially interested in the perceptions of the Italian population – Hitler's erstwhile allies – and the picture that he painted was complex. For example, the residents of Taormina, whom Harrison interviewed in his first few days in Sicily, steadfastly blamed American bombers for the damage done to their town, maintaining that the British planes had flown low enough to pinpoint targets. Harrison

Refugees returning to the ruins of Ortona after the battle, January 1944.





Eric Harrison, a history professor at Queen's University, took command of 1 CFHS when 1st Canadian Corps became operational in Italy.

Harrison spent time with the Allied Military Government (AMG), which had the role of administering Italian towns and re-establishing order once the Germans had been driven out. After witnessing a Canadian major requisition an apartment house in Avellino, leaving the town's podesta (mayor) to find alternate accommodations for 380 locals, he reflected that, "one element in the problem of dealing with the Italian civil population was that they did not regard themselves as a conquered people and expected rather to have things done for them than to have

infrastructure, whose appalling weaknesses were exacerbated by war. Combat often left roads impassable. After the Battle for the Moro, the road from San Leonardo was littered with "trackless, turretless [tanks]," rusted out anti-tank guns, and dismembered Shermans.³⁶ Simply moving about the country was often an ordeal. On 21 January 1944 Harrison remarked that he had "obtained a pretty clear idea of the extraordinary difficulties of maintaining road [communications]." Not only did engineers regularly have to widen roads, but they had to clear them of mines for safe travel. Harrison let the sappers do the talking for him when he copied down the verse written on three signs en route to Rocca: "Wanted Combined [Operations] on the Roads – Combine with the Sappers – We Can Build the Bridges if you can Look after the Roads."³⁷ R.T. Currelly, who joined Harrison's staff as historical officer of 5th Canadian Armoured Division, noted in August 1944 that soldiers learned to deal with bad roads just as they did many other aspects of the war:

In all this filth, fatigue and bodily discomfort the same old time-worn humour and perpetual good nature persist. Someone's truck slips on a soft shoulder and rolls over. The driver is sitting dejectedly in the burning dust waiting, perhaps hours, for a Recovery Lorry. Nearly everyone who passes has something to shout, such as "Wotcha thinkin' about Jock?," or "That's a stooped place to park!"³⁸

For Harrison and Currelly, the effect of Italian roads on soldiers' experiences was as interesting and worthy of note as was its influence on the conduct of operations.

To be sure, the historians were primarily interested in how the Canadians conducted operations and documenting this was their

recorded that he "had heard the same story from other parts of Sicily. Whether it is an accurate version of what took place or merely Sicilian tact is a moot point."³²

The citizens of Rome were more appreciative of the Allies' efforts, having spent nearly a year under Nazi occupation after the capitulation of Benito Mussolini in July 1943. Harrison arrived in Rome on 7 June 1944, just days after its liberation by the US Fifth Army. "The city had not yet recovered from the enthusiasm and emotion...the people thronged the streets smiled and waved." In the midst of their jubilation, however, "it was observed that they had not yet had time to take down the anti-British and American posters from their walls." One poster showed bombs marked "Made in USA" plummeting towards cowering women and children; it read: "These are the Liberators."³³

Allied opinions of the Italians were more consistent. In December 1943,

demands made upon them."³⁴ This statement, of course, says as much about Harrison as it does about the Italians.

Harrison was sometimes placed in the awkward position of recording the absurd for posterity. In May 1944, for example, he spoke with an AMG officer who had dealt with seven cases of rape in one day, and believed that the majority were not committed by Canadians, but rather by Germans who had crossed into the Canadian area incognito. Harrison neither confirmed nor denied this unlikely allegation, evidence that he understood his observations were potentially sensitive. However, while Harrison kept silent about his own conclusions, he recorded the officer's opinion for future historical research.³⁵

Dealing with the Italian population was an important challenge that affected operational efficiency and effectiveness. Another was the condition of the country's

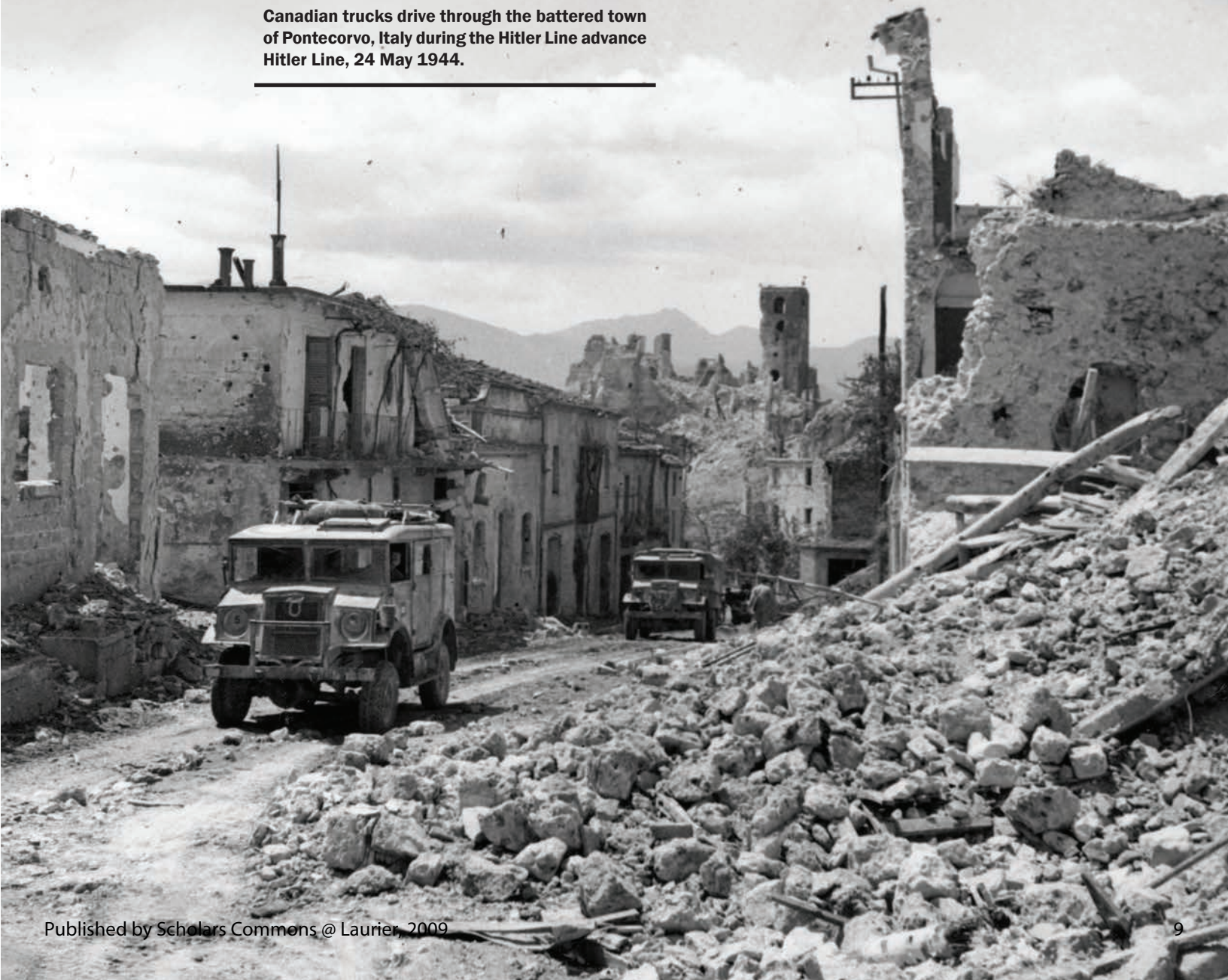
core purpose. Since the end of the war, historians have debated the effectiveness of the Eighth Army's rigid artillery-based doctrine in Italy. "The price paid for an overwhelming emphasis on firepower was to restrict the other half of the fire and movement equation," wrote William McAndrew in 1987. Instead of heeding Sun Tzu and "flowing along paths of least resistance," the Canadians' emphasis on rigid artillery plans minimized their ability to exploit unexpected opportunities.³⁹ The field historians keyed in on this issue as it was debated in the field. Both General H.D.G. Crerar and his successor as corps commander,

General E.L.M. Burns, believed detailed preparations were necessary before any assault on dug-in German defensive positions. "It is a matter for the record," Harrison wrote, "that the Corps [Commander] belonged to that school of thought which preferred thoroughness and deliberation to the impetuosity which might well have met with reverses at the outset of this first commitment of the [Canadian] Corps to an offensive battle."⁴⁰

Others, like Lord Tweedsmuir, the officer who led the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment up the backside of a Sicilian cliff to capture the town of Assoro by stealth, lectured

that "great reliance had...to be placed upon improvisation."⁴¹ Harrison tended to agree with corps command. For example, on the assault on the Hitler Line in May 1944, Harrison reported that "when the tension broke and at the appointed [hour] the barrage came screaming down, it was evident that the deliberation with which the assault had been prepared would assuredly confirm the victory with a minimum loss of life."⁴² The attention that Harrison devotes in his war diary to infrastructure and terrain suggests that his analysis was formed, at least in part, by having seen too closely the obstacles (man-made and natural) that restricted

Canadian trucks drive through the battered town of Pontecorvo, Italy during the Hitler Line advance Hitler Line, 24 May 1944.





Canadian troops enter the village of San Pancrazio, Italy where the previous week German soldiers had massacred the male inhabitants. The “D-Day Dodgers” fought a gruelling, attritional campaign in Italy where they served in the shadow of events in Northwest Europe, but they were well served by efforts of 1st Canadian Field Historical Section to record their accomplishments.

movement, including blown-bridges, steep roads, vineyards, orchards, stream networks, mountain ranges, narrow valleys, and the ubiquitous and capricious German 88s.

Harrison and Hughes believed that “success” needed to be measured not by the achievement of a breakout – which never came – but by the attrition of the enemy. In one report, Hughes suggested it was laudable that in the drudging months spent pushing the Germans from their “Winter Line” through Ortona

towards Pescara, “a heavy toll had been exacted from the obstinate enemy.”⁴³ This was not to say that the historians were unaware when operations fell short. For instance, Harrison recorded in March that “the front was strangely quiet...A posture of defence had been assumed and the verdict registered of a winter campaign which had failed to achieve its objectives.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the historians concluded that over the winter the Germans had been hit hard, thrown back and were then

scrambling to save their defences at Cassino.

The emphasis on destruction of enemy forces was apparent in Harrison’s discussion in his war diary of the US Fifth Army’s liberation of Rome, and word, two days later on 6 June 1944, that the Allies had landed in Normandy.

The news [about the Normandy landings] was greeted with enthusiasm, but not without a hint of regret that 1 [Canadian] Corps

was no longer in the battle. For although the capture of Rome had not been the primary objective of the offensive...its liberation could not but be regarded as a triumphant climax to the dusty battles of the Liri valley.⁴⁵

While the glory of capturing the capital would have been a well-earned honour, Harrison believed that "the front was too narrow for both the Fifth and British Eighth Armies to converge upon a point of small tactical importance."⁴⁶ Rome was not the main objective – the destruction of the German Army in Italy was.

The slow slogging of attrition had little glory for the men involved. Stacey, while in Italy on a liaison visit in March 1944, remarked:

It may be noted at this point that our observation was that in general the Canadian troops do not like Italy. Complaints of the dirt and squalor of the country were universal; and it was obvious that an unusually severe winter had been a particularly unpleasant introduction to the country. There is also some feeling that the Italian campaign is a "sideshow" by comparison with the operations on the United Kingdom, projected for North-West Europe. Several officers remarked that it was unfortunate that the Canadian Army should be divided between two theatres of war instead of acting as a united force. There appeared to be a very general envy of the troops preparing for action in England, and there was widespread interest, evidenced by many questions, in the prospect of the "Second Front." Nevertheless, the Canadian Troops in Italy were, in general, obviously in good heart, and were looking forward to further action.⁴⁷

Charles Comfort noted a similar sentiment when he wrote in his

memoirs that shortly after the Battle of Ortona a rumour swept through 1 CID that they were being moved back to England in March.⁴⁸ The rumour was unfounded and perhaps just wishful thinking on the part of battalion commanders, fatigued from pushing their troops through the inhospitable Italian peaks and gullies, and incurring heavy casualties for no apparent war-winning reason.

Soldiers fighting in Italy knew that they were fighting in a secondary theatre, while the "real war" was fought in Northwest Europe, and this opinion was duly recorded by the field historians. By documenting this perception among soldiers, the field historians made an important contribution to the interpretive framework that has dominated the study of the Italian theatre for the past 60 years. Nowhere is this interpretive framework more apparent than in the final pages of *From Pachino to Ortona*, the preliminary account of the Italian campaign published in 1946. In the conclusion, Stacey and Hughes found it hard to explain why the Canadians were in theatre. The Canadian formations, however, did have the honour of being among the Allied forces that first breached Fortress Europa, and could be proud of their association with the renowned Eighth Army and its leader General Bernard Montgomery. The Canadians who survived from "the Sicilian hills swimming in the August heat to the icy, shell-churned mud above the Moro," could rest assured that, as the final line of the book declares, their experiences were an inspiration to the tens of thousands of other Canadians poised to cross the Channel.⁴⁹ It was a fitting tribute to the D-Day Dodgers.

Stacey went to extraordinary lengths to make certain that a balanced and comprehensive record of the Canadian Army's effort in the Second World War was kept. He did this by ensuring that the officers of No.1 Field Historical Section

understood and endeavoured to meet those standards. Certainly, as Harrison wrote in 1948, their assignment to carry out research in such depth reflected well on the army: "in such a context of success or failure, the admission of the historian as eye-witness, cross-examiner, and custodian of the evidence, asserts a confident will to submit to trial by history."⁵⁰ The "top-down" documentation, including interviews with key commanders and staff officers, gathered by the field historians as their primary mission recorded decision-making before, during, and after actions. In their preliminary comments on this material, the field historians made important interpretations of the Italian campaign, on specific matters such as British and Canadian attack doctrine, and on such broader questions as the measures of success in hard-fought battles of attrition. At the same time, the work of the artists, and the observations recorded by the historians in their diaries, did much to capture experience "from the ground," providing material for future scholarship in new fields of study on the social and cultural dimensions of the war.

Notes

1. C.P. Stacey, *A Date with History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1983), pp.104-105.
2. G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellion* (London: Longman, Green, 1936).
3. Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), p.100.
4. *Canada in Flanders* was a three-volume series published between 1916 and 1918. Aitken penned the first two volumes and Charles G.D. Roberts the third. Aitken was the series editor.
5. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston: Little Brown, 1942).
6. Morison wanted to tell "[the Navy's] story effectively." The result of his efforts was a 15-book official history series on the United States Navy. Gregory M. Pfitzer, *Samuel Eliot Morison's Historical*

- World: In Quest of a New Parkman* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), pp.172, 184.
7. Kent Roberts Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army* (New York: Kennikat, 1954), p.11.
 8. Forrest C. Pogue and Holly C. Shulman, "Forrest C. Pogue and the Birth of Public history in the Army," *The Public Historian* 15:1 (Winter 1993), p.31. The first in the 14-volume American Forces in Action series, *To Bizerte with the II Corps*, was published by the Historical Division in December 1943. The US Army Center of Military History has made the entire series available online at <<http://www.history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/collect/afia.html>>.
 9. Stacey, *A Date with History*, p.115.
 10. S.H.S. Hughes, *Steering the Course: A Memoir* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), p.91.
 11. Dean Oliver and Laura Brandon, *Canvas of War: Painting the Canadian Experience, 1914-1945* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 2000), pp.156-62. While this paper does not discuss the photographic record of the war, this is a definite area for future research.
 12. See W.J. McAndrew, "Recording the War: Uncommon Canadian Perspectives of the Italian Campaign," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 18:3 (1988), pp.43-50, and Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, pp.101-102.
 13. Lieutenant-Colonel C.P. Stacey, historical officer, CMHQ, London, to Captain W.E.C. Harrison, historical officer I Canadian Corps headquarters, February 1944, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) RG 24, Vol. 12,756, 24/Operations/2.
 14. McAndrew, "Recording the War," p.45.
 15. Harrison's studies include: "The University Teaching of International Affairs," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 2:3 (August 1936), pp.431-439; *Canada, the War and After* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1942); with A.N. Reid and Walter Nash, *Canada and the United Nations: Report on the Proceedings of the Fifth [i.e. Ninth] Annual Conference of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Contemporary Affairs Series No. 15* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942); *Canada in World Affairs, 1949-1950* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1957).
 16. Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900-1970* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 169.
 17. Lieutenant-Colonel C.P. Stacey, historical officer CMHQ, London, to Captain S.H.S. Hughes, historical officer 1st Canadian Infantry Division headquarters, 12 October 1943, LAC RG 24, Vol. 12,756, 24/Operations/2, Document 37.
 18. "General Activities of the Historical Section," LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,406, 24/Operations/1 (Hist)
 19. Stacey, *A Date with History*, pp.127-128.
 20. Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.111.
 21. Charles Fraser Comfort, *Artist at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1956), p.ix.
 22. Colonel C.P. Stacey, historical officer CMHQ, London, to Major L.A. Wrinch, historical officer 1st CFHS, 24 January 1945 and 26 January 1945, LAC RG 24, Vol. 12,756, 24/Operations/2. Before Stacey's first letter had reached Italy, he received another shipment of paintings that he deemed to be "considerably superior" to the previous, as they were more "lively and vigorous," and included more operational scenes.
 23. Major W.E.C. Harrison, historical officer I Canadian Corps Headquarters, to Lieutenant-Colonel C.P. Stacey, historical officer CMHQ, London, 14 January 1944, LAC, RG 24 Vol. 12,756 24/Operations/2.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Canada's war art was housed in the National Gallery of Canada after the war. According to Laura Brandon, the Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, a debate regarding the value of the paintings as art occurred in the post-war period. As the international art community bent towards modernism, the traditional, landscape paintings of the war artists was increasingly passé. Considered more history than art, the pieces were transferred to the War Museum in 1971, where, in the last two decades, they have increasingly become appreciated as both art and history. Laura Brandon, "A Unique and Important Asset? The Transfer of the War Art Collections from the National Gallery of Canada to the Canadian War Museum," *Material History Review* 42 (Fall 1995), pp.67-74.
 26. War Diary (WD) 1st Canadian Field Historical Section (1 CFHS), 28 April 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,505.
 27. "Records to be Maintained by Historical Officers," LAC 24, Vol. 10,406, 24/Operations/1 (Hist)
 28. WD 1 CFHS, 16 June 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,505.
 29. Ibid., 11 November 1944.
 30. Ibid., 27 February 1944.
 31. Ibid., 24 May 1944.
 32. Ibid., 12 November 1944.
 33. Ibid., 7 June 1944.
 34. Ibid., 3 December 1943.
 35. Ibid., 31 May 1944.
 36. Ibid., 22 February 1944.
 37. Ibid., 21 January 1944.
 38. Ibid., WD 5th Canadian Armoured Division Sub-Section, 31 August 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,505.
 39. William McAndrew, "Fire or Movement?: Canadian Tactical Doctrine, Sicily—1943," *Military Affairs* 51:3 (1987), p.141.
 40. WD 1 CFHS, 22 May 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,505.
 41. Ibid., 14 December 1944.
 42. Ibid., 23 May 1944.
 43. Captain T.M. Hunter and Major S.H.S. Hughes, "Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Officer's Report. Report No. 129: Canadian Operations in Italy, September – December 1943: Preliminary Report," p.31.
 44. WD 1 CFHS, 25 March 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,505.
 45. Ibid., 6 June 1944.
 46. Ibid.
 47. WD Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., Appendix II, "Visit of Col. A.F. Duguid, D.S.C. (D.H.S.) and Lt.-Col. C.P. Stacey Hist Offr, C.M.H.Q., to Canadian Formations in Italy, March-April 1944," LAC RG 24 Vol. 17,508.
 48. Comfort, *Artist at War*, pp.111-112.
 49. Historical Section of the General Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters, Great Britain, *From Pachino to Ortona, the Canadian Campaign in Sicily and Italy, 1943: The Canadians at War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1946), pp.159-160.
 50. W.E.C. Harrison, "The Army's Official History," *Canadian Historical Review* 29,3 (1948), p.301.

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