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Table of Contents

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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY



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Articles

- 5** **The Canadian Corps' Long March: Logistics, Discipline, and the Occupation of the Rhineland**
Chris Hyland

- 21** **Investigating the Memory of Operation Spring: The Inquiry into the Black Watch and the Battle of St. André-sur-Orne, 1944-46**
Alexander Fitzgerald-Black

- 33** **Kurt Meyer and Canadian Memory: Villain and Monster, Hero and Victim or worse – a German?**
Peter Kikkert

- 45** **"We Germans...are British Subjects": The First World War and the Curious Case of Berlin, Ontario, Canada**
William J. Campbell

CANADIAN
WAR MUSEUM



MUSÉE CANADIEN
DE LA GUERRE

- 58** **Brush, Canvas, Paint, and Uniform: Malak Karsh's portrait photographs of Second World War Canadian War Artists**
Anja N. Werner

- 69** **Autobiography and Biography: The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History**
J.L. Granatstein and Dean F. Oliver

Features

- 76** **Canada's East Coast Forts**
Charles H. Bogart and Terrance McGovern

Other Matters

- 2** **From the Editor-in-Chief**
3 **CMH Mailbox**

From the Editor-in-Chief

One of the celebratory events for Wilfrid Laurier University's centenary in 2011 was a special spring and summer course, "War and Memory." This was a cooperative venture, designed by Terry Copp on behalf of the LCMSDS, with financial and administrative support of the Arts faculty (Dean Mike Carroll), and the History Department (John Laband, chair). Peter Farrugia of WLU Brantford led the "memory" side of the course, and your editor took on the "war" aspects.

The central feature was a two-week tour of Canadian battlefields of both world wars in Belgium, northern France, and Normandy (Centre members Matt Symes and Oliver Haller, both battlefield studies veterans, looked after logistics and joined in the teaching). Seventeen fourth-year and MA level students received travel bursaries. Each prepared a research presentation on a topic related to a particular site that they delivered at the site during the tour. They then used material gathered on the tour – which included remarkable seminar discussions at each site -- to produce fully developed drafts.

The students' work was of outstanding quality. On the recommendation of our peer reviewers we have included in the present issue Alexander Fitzgerald-Black's study of the role of memory in the historical record of the Black Watch's ill-fated attack at Verrières Ridge during Operation Spring on 25 July 1944. Despite the care with which the Army's official historians collected and verified the testimony of survivors immediately after the war, controversy – contested memory – remains surrounding the responsibility for the decision to attack.

This issue includes two other pieces on controversies. Peter Kikkert of Western University has examined a wide range of press coverage, as well as unpublished letters to ministers of the Canadian government, concerning the case of Kurt Meyer, the regimental

commander in the 12th SS Panzer Division who was found guilty by a Canadian military court for the murder by his troops of Canadian prisoners of war during the first days of the Normandy campaign. Meyer's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, and he was ultimately released in 1954, to a chorus of public criticism, but, as Peter notes, also with some significant support. William Campbell, who teaches history at California State University at Chico but was raised in Elmira, Ontario, just north of Kitchener-Waterloo, examines the First World War situation of Berlin, Ontario. He places in a broad context the various controversies surrounding the loyalty of the German population of Berlin. William highlights the pronounced lack of support in the community for the change of name to Kitchener in 1916, in honour of the recently deceased British secretary of war, and the response of the population by voting out its pro-conscription Conservative/Unionist MP in the Federal election of 1917.

Chris Hyland of the University of Calgary, by contrast, investigates a controversy that wasn't, the occupation of the Rhineland by the Canadian Corps from December 1918 to February 1919. Delays in the repatriation of the Canadian forces, a gruelling march across Belgium into Germany in bad weather and with poor logistical support because of the destroyed transportation infrastructure, and close contact with the enemy population all raised concerns about a failure of discipline among citizen-soldiers impatient to go home. There were, however, only minor incidents, none of which, the records suggest, involved the German population, the eventuality that most worried senior Canadian and British commanders. In fact, the corps performed with the same professionalism, including notable flexibility in logistics, that had been fine tuned in the climactic battles of the Hundred Days.

One aspect of Canadian military history studies that deserves more attention is interest and support among colleagues in the United States. In September 2011 the US Coast Defense Study Group made a tour of historic fortifications in Atlantic Canada. The high level of their preparatory research, and the care with which they examined the sites, was reflected in the reports they published in their newsletter, which the group has kindly allowed us to republish here. Your editor assisted with the preparations, but was then unable to join the tour. However, the group has permitted me slightly to revise the text to reflect some technical points I would have made if I had had the pleasure of participating. Of special note is the excellent assistance the group received from Parks Canada and the Department of National Defence; I would like also to mention the help in making arrangements in Halifax of Commander David Peer, RCN, and Derek Sarty, the noted graphic designer who has a passion for Nova Scotia history (and, yes, another member of a certain clan from that province).

In the Canadian War Museum section art historian Anja Nadine Werner presents the results of her work in the museum's holdings of a series of photographs taken by the prominent Ottawa photographer Malak Karsh in 1946 of Canadian war artists at work in their studios. The photographs were commissioned by the *Montreal Standard* magazine which, as Anja shows, cropped them severely for publication thus changing Malak's strong conception. He had prominently featured one of the artist's major works in each portrait, but this key aspect – the relationship between the artist and his or her canvasses – all but disappeared in the magazine article. Anja's piece features the original images, together with the cropped versions to show how Malak's vision was altered.

We have reprinted two innovative articles, on military biography and autobiography, that appeared in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military*

History by J.L. Granatstein and Dean Oliver (Oxford University Press and the Canadian War Museum, 2011). We will in the future be reprinting further articles from this important book that offer insights into the state of military history scholarship in this country.

Roger Sarty
May 2012

Dear Sir,

In your Summer 2011 issue you gave an account of the attack on Troteval Farm by the Fusiliers Mont-Royal (FMR) in July 1944. The article is in the words of Major Jacques Dextraze and starts "on 20th July, my battalion had put in an attack on Beauvoir and Troteval Farms and Verrieres. That attack ended with our holding Beauvoir Farm but we were not successful in taking Troteval Farm or Verrieres." We did, in fact, take Troteval Farm. I was there, as a FOO (forward observation officer).

To correct the record, the regimental history of the FMR and the war diary of 4th Field Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery show that both farms were actually captured but Captain Gordon Hunter, the FOO at Beauvoir, was severely wounded and the Germans quickly took it back.

Troteval, on the other hand, was captured by C Company under Major Fernand Mousseau and held for 48 hours despite many counterattacks during which the supporting artillery from 4th Field Regiment fired over 600 rounds per gun.

At this point Troteval was the lone new position held by the 2nd Division across the entire front. Eventually, with no reinforcements arriving, and all ammunition expended, Major Mousseau and the 17 surviving men of C Company (of whom 12 were wounded) had no choice but to surrender when overrun by two Tiger tanks and panzer grenadiers of 12th SS Panzer Division.

I could not let this error stand, as Major Mousseau was a good friend and a brave soldier.

A. Britton Smith
(one-time captain, RCA)
Kingston, Ontario

Dear Sir,

I was deeply moved in receiving from you the Winter 2012 issue of *Canadian Military History* and in opening it seeing the article on my brother Leslie. I am profoundly grateful to you for carrying



this article and for sending me copies of the issue, and be assured so will be my family. Especially so my brother Leonard, who is shown with Leslie in one of the pictures as they are mounting the train in the town of Nipawin after having finished their embarkation leave. He is now 92 years old, a bit older than Leslie would have been, and in fairly good health in a residence in Saskatoon. Only he and I remain of our large family except of course our many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

When the Canadian War Museum contacted me asking if I would wish to respond to Sian Price's request for information concerning my brother I was of course most pleased to do so. I did not then have any idea that this would lead to the splendid article you have published, being only so glad that Leslie's letter, so moving and poignant in so few words, would be made available to more people. I had a few years earlier decided that I should give the original of the letter as well as Leslie's medals to the War Museum, for which they were grateful, rather than risk having them lost as time went by especially since the letter is written on thin air mail letter paper of the kind so popular at the time.

For many years we were unaware of the details of Leslie's death. So I began researching and in reading the war diaries in the archives in Ottawa I ran across in stark detail an account of what had happened. To this was later added the personal information in Dan Harrigan's book *A Rising of Courage* as well as other references. To crown all this, in going over with a group of veterans of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in 2004 for the 60th D-Day celebrations I met John Ross who was in the same plane as my brother for jumping into Normandy and who personally saw the remains of my brother and his comrade minutes after the 75 mm German shell had hit them and their ammunition belts. This happened on the second floor of the Gatehouse of the Chateau of Varaville. The Chateau no longer exists but the Gatehouse is still there, repaired of course, and outside of it is a bronze plaque gives the names of the six parachutists including Leslie who were killed there on 6 June 1944.

Again thank you so very much for your thoughtfulness.

Edward P. Neufeld
Mississauga, ON

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