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## “Get Tough Stay Tough: Shaping the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918 (Book Review)” by Kenneth Radley

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Kenneth Radley, *Get Tough Stay Tough: Shaping the Canadian Corps 1914-1918*. Solihull, UK: Heleon & Company, 2014. Pp. 423.

In 2006 Kenneth Radley published *We Lead Others Follow*, which claimed to be a history—indeed, the first history—of a Canadian division from either of the world wars. In fact, it was not so much a history of the First Division as a detailed examination and evaluation of the division’s leadership. Not surprisingly, as Radley is a retired lieutenant colonel, he concluded that the First Division became a very good fighting force because of “sound command and control, good staff work and excellent training” (p. xvii).

Having said that, he recognized that these factors “did not tell the whole story of Canadian skill at arms, 1914-18” and so he determined to examine “discipline, the relationship between officers and ORs [other ranks] and morale” (p. xv) in the Canadian Corps, issues that in his opinion had so far received “almost no attention” (p. xviii). In other words, this book is intended to be a companion volume to *We Lead Others Follow*, although it examines the entire Corps, not just the First Division. Despite his statement of intent just quoted, he subsequently says that his focus is on “the junior officer-Other Ranks relationship ... because those men were the “most vulnerable in the mad world of war” (p. xviii). Further clarification comes some twenty pages later when he says that “the aim of this book is to assess the influence of discipline, morale and the officer-OR relationship, as they stood within the Canadian Corps, upon combatant officers and men” (p. 23). One assumes that what he really wants to determine is the impact of strict discipline, high morale and a proper or effective relationship between junior officers and men on the fighting effectiveness of the Canadian Corps.

What follows is a lengthy examination of leadership which is not actually limited to junior officers, a discussion of the relationship between discipline and morale, much information on crime and punishment, all intended to demonstrate how civilians were turned into soldiers and all reflecting the author’s conviction that strict, immediate but fair discipline is essential to the effectiveness of any army. In other words, he began with a thesis and set about to prove it.

This is a lengthy book densely packed with information, anecdotes, and detailed discussion of specific cases related to his themes and supporting his conclusions. The chapter on courts martial

and the application of executions is particularly interesting and useful, revealing that Canadian officers were too inclined to recommend executions for Haig's taste. Indeed, the entire book is fascinating and reflects an exhaustive review of official records and memoirs, as well as impressive reading of secondary sources and other relevant literature not limited to the war but in the broader field of military history generally. Thus, it meets the goal of the Wolverhampton Military Studies Series, i.e. to publish books that are "new and innovative, and academically vigorous" but aimed at "all readers, whatever their particular interests, or their levels of interest in the subject" (p. xii).

And yet this book could have been so much better if Radley had had the benefit of a good editor. He writes smoothly and confidently and displays an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge of military history, but one cannot help feeling sometimes that there is too much information, or perhaps that the material could be more focused. While it is organised thematically, Radley's themes naturally overlap and the book would have benefited from a more clearly articulated narrative and a concluding chapter that could have pulled some order out of the mass of evidence.

Another problem—admittedly not a major one—is that Radley has another purpose in writing this book other than what he declared at the outset. A retired career officer, he believes that the army is under-appreciated by Canadians and expresses the hope that greater awareness of Canadian achievements in the First World War "might hasten a time when 'the Army' is instead commonly referred to as 'our Army'" (p. xvii). He also believes that the army has been seriously underfunded and diverted into ill-advised activities by successive governments. He denounces, for example, "the steady diet over decades of incessant media and government touting of the pap of "peace-keeping" (p. xvi), later referring to "the make-do world of an Army that was starved of resources for decades, its *raison d'être* [no accent] compromised by the mirage called peace-keeping, [and] became confused about its ultimate purpose" (p. 22). "Recent and ongoing events west and north of the Khyber Pass," he tells us, "show why an Army exists." Clearly, in his opinion, that is to wage war and "the title of this book represents a continuity—war means get tough and stay tough, how to become the former and remain the latter" (p. xvi).

These gratuitous political observations on the legitimacy of peacekeeping, public attitudes and the state of the modern army serve

no useful purpose in this book but his admittedly opaque comment on Afghanistan is more troubling, suggesting as it does that the Canadian army was not tough enough to carry out the role assigned to it in the NATO intervention. Casual throwaway comments of this sort are always inappropriate, regardless of one's views on the legitimacy of this particular mission, and this one constitutes an unnecessary diversion which may well be considered offensive to the large numbers of men and women who died or were injured while serving in Afghanistan.

But these comments reflect a larger problem. Radley's approach to his work—in both of his books—is that of an old-fashioned pro-military flag-waver who seeks not only to understand and explain historical issues but to promote the idea that the Canadians were the best among the Allied forces. Thus, “the present book for me is another chapter in understanding what our fighting men won for Canada and for Britain” and “Canadian bayonets were exceedingly sharp and active and gained much for our young nation” (p. xvii). This kind of language serves no useful purpose and detracts from an otherwise scholarly book.

The book includes an impressive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources, even though, rather oddly, he claims that Cyril Falls' 1931 bibliography, *War Books*, “is still the best bibliography on the war” (p. 31). As lengthy as Radley's bibliography is, however, there are curious omissions such as G.W.L. Nicholson's history of the CEF, Andrew Iarocci's *Shoestring Soldiers*, Bill Rawling's *Surviving Trench Warfare* and Mark Humphries' *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*. As for Tim Cook's extensive publications, he lists only one book and none of his articles.

Still, *Get Tough Stay Tough* is a good read, full of unusual quotations and anecdotes, and most readers, whether serious historians or those with a more casual interest in Canada's involvement in the First World War will appreciate Radley's impressive research and will find much of interest in this book.

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