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Review of "From Rinks to Regiments: Hockey Hall-of-Famers and the Great War" by Alan Livingstone MacLeod

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Book Reviews



Alan Livingstone MacLeod. *From Rinks to Regiments: Hockey Hall-of-Famers and the Great War*. Victoria, British Columbia: Heritage House Publishing Company, Ltd., 2018. Pp. 186.

Like many North American youngsters, Alan Livingstone MacLeod became infatuated with hockey as a child. As he grew, so did his interest. His passion for the game's history led to *From Rinks to Regiments: Hockey Hall-of-Famers and the Great War*, an account of members of the Hockey Hall of Fame who served in the First World War. As MacLeod states, "This is a book for all the hockey-loving kids of 1960 and everyone else curious about a group of young men, now largely forgotten, and the fascinating stories about their careers as elite hockey players and soldiers of the Great War" (p. 4).

MacLeod focuses on the stories of thirty-two men—thirty players and two others—who served in the Canadian armed forces during the war. Following an introductory chapter covering the history of hockey in Canada beginning in the late 19th century, MacLeod organises the book into three sections: the first covers the men born between 1877 and 1891; the second is for men born between 1892 and 1895; and the final section covers the men born after 1895. MacLeod's organizational aim is to group the men who played before, during, and after the war; however, this arrangement proves cumbersome and does not provide any advantages. Furthermore, there is enough chronological overlap to render the arrangement unnecessary. A simple alphabetical listing by surname might have better served readers. MacLeod dedicates between four and six pages per player, and includes information on the subject's hockey career as well as a brief account of their military service; however, most of the commentary is focused on each man's postwar life. MacLeod gives plenty of hockey statistics that show why each man is in the Hall of Fame.

MacLeod succeeds at showing the players' diverse war experience. For example, the players served in a wide variety of capacities during the war. A few served briefly and only in Canada while the rest saw longer service overseas. Most served in the Canadian Army while a few transferred to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), such as Conn Smythe, who flew with the RFC as an observer. He earned the Military Cross and was shot down and taken prisoner by the Germans. He survived his captivity and served again during World War II (pp. 104-105). Other stories include Bill Cook, who served in the Canadian field artillery in France and in the ill-fated Allied Siberian expedition. Ace pilot Harry Ellis Watson shot down six German airplanes while flying an SE5A with No. 41 Squadron, and would later play for the Toronto Granites and the Canadian Olympic team. Other notable characters include Iceland native Frank Frederickson, who survived a ship torpedoing and several aircraft crashes, and American Hobey Baker, who shot down three German aircraft and died in a postwar crash. Some of the men served in the 228th Northern Fusiliers, a special hockey-playing unit created with the notion that it would "induce young impressionable men into doing their bit for King and Country" (p. 108). The unit was later converted to a railway construction and repair unit.

Through the stories of these players, MacLeod examines the human element of the First World War. The Canadian army was largely comprised of such young enthusiastic men who interrupted promising careers to serve. The Hall of Famers were, of course, accomplished in their profession, but Macleod asserts that we must remember that all servicemen and women left jobs and families for military service; as he states: "Apart from their status as elite hockey players, the men of the Hockey Hall of Fame who served in the war are a microcosm: a cross-section of the entire body of men – both ordinary and remarkable - who fought for Canada between 1914 and 1918" (p. 12).

In addition to writing for hockey fans, MacLeod also intends to highlight "the nexus—collision might be a better term—between hockey and war" (p. 6). He accomplishes this, but in a general sense. *From Rinks to Regiments* is a work of popular history, meant to inform and entertain hockey fans. Aside from a short concluding chapter, MacLeod does not make any overarching arguments about the significance of the players' service, nor does he provide an

examination of the social and economic impacts of the Great War upon hockey. There is no discussion about the conduct and progress of the war; the sole focus is on these Hall of Famers.

MacLeod's book is in line with recent books covering, for example, baseball players who served in the American forces.¹ These works examine the composition of the forces that fought the war, highlighting individual players and describing their sports careers and military service. Such books give us a greater understanding of the people who served their country during the war.

The book is not footnoted, but MacLeod includes a three-page essay regarding his sources. These are mostly secondary sources covering the sport of hockey. MacLeod includes photographs of the men, most of them in military uniform and in hockey gear, and many hockey cards that will be of interest to collectors. While this book will be sure to please hockey fans, and sports fans in general, it will also appeal to those who are interested in the human side of the war. It is a fine addition to the historiography of Canadian forces in the Great War.

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¹ See Alexander F. Barnes, Peter L. Belmonte and Samuel Barnes, *Play Ball! Doughboys and Baseball during the Great War* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Co., 2019); Jim Leeke, *From Dugouts to the Trenches: Baseball During the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).