
J.L. Granatstein
York University

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rich Relations


This book has been much praised and deservedly so. It is wellwritten and well-researched, and mirabile dictu, it includes substantial material on the impact of the half-million Canadians who, along with some three million Americans, served time in Britain during the Second World War.

Reynolds, a Cambridge University historian married to an American, has done extensive research in the British, American, and Canadian archives, and he has read widely in the secondary literature. The result is a detailed examination of the way different cultures dealt with each other, clashed or integrated, and how the respective bureaucracies tried to cope. There is even some material on how Canadians and Americans got on badly at first but better as time went on, thanks, Reynolds opines, to the fact that Canadians came to see that their British past was being replaced by an American future. He even cites Major-General F.F. Worthington as suggesting that since American equipment and ideas were better than those of the British, Canadians should try to serve with the U.S. forces. No wonder Fighting Frank had to be got rid of in 1944!

The Americans, of course, had special problems - black soldiers, for example - that the Canadians scarcely had, and, according to black GIs, the Canadian Army handled matters much better. The Americans also wanted their full pay, better food than hungry British civilians, and the right to try their soldiers in their own courts; they had sufficient clout to get their way (including food that amounted to three times the civilian ration). And the Canadians? For the most part, Canadians lived on the execrable British rations, in Britain and in action, part of their higher pay than British soldiers received was deferred or assigned back home, and the Canadian authorities went along with the application of British justice to their military miscreants. Reynolds notes dryly that two Americans serving in the Canadian Army robbed a Briton at gunpoint and were sentenced to imprisonment and the lash; the U.S. ambassador intervened successfully to have the whipping foregone. Too bad Ambassador Winant - or someone - wasn't there to assist Canadian soldiers on their way to Dartmoor and/or the Glasshouse. Essentially, the conclusion from this study is that Canada's military acted like that of a colonial state; the Americans demanded that they be treated as equals and were.

In his one full chapter on the Canadians, "A Day Trip to Dieppe," Reynolds makes the case - in contradistinction to Desmond Morton and others who have suggested that the Canadians were not champing at the bit to see action - that morale in 1942 was such a serious problem that the Canadian commanders virtually had to get their troops into action. And, he points out, even after the August 1942 debacle, morale rose in virtually all units. At last, the Canadians had fought, the single day at Dieppe helping to put an end to the constant carping from the British about how long the Canadians were going to sit in beautiful Salisbury doing nothing.

Sex naturally enters into the story, and Reynolds is interesting here. Forty percent of Canadians who fell victim to venereal disease had had intercourse in London; only 30 per cent of Americans became infected there. (I must admit to being unsure what this means.) Eventually, the Canadian and American forces jointly persuaded the reluctant British to tackle the VD epidemic with a program of tracing sexual contacts, along the lines of those long employed in North America, that had some success. GIs. Reynolds also says, complained that British condoms were too small, presumably more American bragging: Canadians said nothing - yet another effort by their generals at getting along? And there were more difficulties in the way of a GI trying to marry a British civilian than faced a Canadian. The result was more Canadian war brides than American, despite the much larger numbers of Americans stationed in the U.K. Of course, Canadians were there longer, and briefly in 1940 and for some time after 1942, many were billeted on British civilians. That presumably speeded the Canadians on their way to ever-closer relations. Reynolds also notes that the arrival of Americans in quantity, from 1942 on, helped ease Anglo-Canadian relations - the Canadians could join the Brits in complaining about the bloody Yanks!

Still, the author can make mistakes. He refers to the Princess Patricia's Regiment, for example, and suggests that Militia regiments made up half the 1st Canadian Division in 1939 and militia soldiers half the personnel strength of the division. Not so, when the
Permanent Force, not all of which 
was in the 1st Division, numbered 
only 4,500. He says that 
Montgomery commanded two 
Canadian corps in 1941-2, again 
correct, and he perhaps strains 
a bit to suggest that Canadian and 
British formations were all but 
interchangeable. More seriously 
than these minor slips, Reynolds 
says nothing about the RCAF and 
RCN who had their own tens of 
thousands serving in Britain.

Still, this is a splendid book, a 
model of comparative history that 
is based on wide-ranging primary 
source research. Charles Stacey 
and Barbara Wilson wrote the book 
on Canadians in Britain, but 
Reynolds has demonstrated that by 
bringing the Americans into 
equation (in much the largest way, 
of course), the worth of this kind 
of history can be increased greatly.

J.L. Granatstein 
York University 

(J.L. Granatstein is co-author, with 
Desmond Morton of Victory 1945.)

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The U-Boat 
Hunters

Marc Milner, The U-Boat Hunters: 
The Royal Canadian Navy and the 
Offensive against Germany's 
Submarines (Toronto: University of 
Toronto Press, 1994) $35.00, 326 

In this companion book to North 
Atlantic Run, Marc Milner takes 
an in depth look at the second half 
of the U-Boat war, and the 
involvement of the Royal Canadian 
Navy in the Allied victory. Milner 
brieﬂy recaps the dismal state of the 
RCN in early 1943, and then takes 
the reader through the political, 
administrative, tactical, and 
technical advances made during 
1944-1945. Although this latter 
half of the Atlantic war has been 
traditionally shunned by 
historians, Milner’s careful 
research uncovers the incredible 
advances made by both the Allies 
and the Germans in the ‘art’ of 
submarine warfare. From the 
German Navy Acoustic Torpedo 
(GNAT), to the Canadian Anti­ 
Acoustic Torpedo gear (CAT), and 
the British FOXER, the reader is 
introduced to the nuances of Anti­ 
Submarine Warfare (ASW) in the 
Second World War.

This book remains, however, 
an account of the Canadian 
contribution to the victory at sea. 
As with his earlier work, North 
Atlantic Run, Milner is not 
uncritical of the manner in which 
it was conducted. With the success 
of the convoy system ﬁnally 
assured, “hunter-killer” groups 
were formed to speciﬁcally destroy 
submarines. Zones of 
responsibility were established, 
which saw the United States Navy 
with its carrier-based groups, 
taking a larger share of the 
responsibility. In some cases, this 
marginalized the Canadian effort.

There were many different 
reasons for this occurrence, not the 
least of which was the unavailability 
of modern equipment for Canadian 
use. Certainly the aspirations of 
Admiral Percy Nelles and the 
professional navy for its postwar 
ﬂeet, were partly to blame. Other 
reasons have a basis in decisions 
not to pursue the construction of 
more advanced types of escorts, 
such as the superb Castle-class 
corvette. The abortive Canadian 
designed RX/C radar was yet 
another set back. A sensitive unit, 
it worked very well, when it worked, 
but its maintenance requirements 
were such that it was impractical 
for active duty.

With the arrival of long range 
patrol (LRP) aircraft such as the B­ 
24 Liberator, and the availability of 
better 10 cm radar sets, the nature 
of the Atlantic war was drastically 
changing by late 1944. Ships 
equipped with type 144/45 sonar, 
and the “Q” attachment, as well as 
the more advanced type 147B 
sonar, made identifying a 
submarine in open water easier.

This resulted in the Escort Groups 
achieving a much higher success 
rate against U-Boats. However, the 
problem of identifying a submerged 
submarine in shallow inshore 
waters, persisted throughout the 
war. Situations such as the 
“layering” of water due to differing 
temperatures played havoc with 
accurate identiﬁcation. Therefore 
spring and fall became the best 
times for sub-hunting. The 
technology of bathythermography 
was developed in an attempt to 
combat this situation, and was 
marginally successful. Other 
methods were developed to tackle 
the threat of the U-Boat such as 
hunts to exhaustion. These so 
called “salmon operations” were 
organized in an effort to kill elusive 
U-Boats, but usually resulted in the 
vast expenditure of explosives with 
little to show.

Canadian support groups had, 
by wars end, become quite adept 
at sinking U-Boats; and what makes 
this achievement remarkable was 
almost solely by the volunteer navy. 
As Milner suggests, the professional 
navy was concerned with postwar 
careers, and the accumulation of 
ﬂeet destroyers, cruisers, and 
aircraft carriers. But he never lets 
the reader forget that the Canadian 
Navy’s primary responsibility was 
the safe escort of convoys; 
something which was accomplished 
with great success, under the most 
dire of circumstances.

In the end, The U-Boat Hunters 
is presented as a well-researched 
account of the late war activities of 
the RCN. A “good read,” it is 
supported by maps, photographs, 
comprehensive notes, and a listing 
of U-Boat kills by the RCN from May 
1943 to May 1945. This volume is 
a welcome addition to Milner’s ﬁrst 
book North Atlantic Run, and 
should be enjoyed by the Naval 
fraternity and the general public 
alike.

Rob Bromley 
Wilfrid Laurier University