

PREFACE

NOW ALMOST FIFTY YEARS BEHIND US, Canada's Second World War experience is fading into a past as distant as the Conquest or Confederation for most of the population. What little post-war generations know of the war comes from textbooks that focus more on the evacuation of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast or the struggles of women to keep wartime jobs in the peace than on the national military-industrial effort that mobilized and armed a million men and women in a great crusade to win a just war. Television programs such as "The Valour and the Horror" provide large dollops of misinformation, sometimes twisting the efforts and sacrifices of those who fought the war to suit the producers' post-Vietnam War sensibilities. No wonder the surviving veterans, their numbers dwindling year by year, feel outraged that their country has forgotten them and, worse still, scorned their sacrifices.

This book may make some veterans angry, too, though not, I trust, for the same reasons. It is an attempt to look at the Canadian army's war from a unique perspective. Although it is a "top down" history, it is not an examination of generals and their great campaigns. Operations naturally enter into this story, but it is not operational history. Nor does Canada's role in making Allied political or battlefield strategy figure in — we had none. Instead, this collective biography of the Canadian army's general officers tries to answer some different questions from those hitherto posed about Canada's war. Who were our generals and where did they come from? What institutions shaped them and what was their standard of military professionalism? Why did they

rise? Why did some succeed and some fail? This book also focuses heavily on the role of personality, on army politics, on dealings with politicians and bureaucrats, and on our soldiers' relations with our allies, most notably the British. There were sixty-eight officers who held the rank of major-general or higher during the Second World War (a list appears as Appendix A), a group too large to allow treatment of them all. Instead, I have tried to look at this cadre on a collective basis in the first chapter, where I also talk about the military institutions that shaped them all. The next seven chapters look at key individuals, most notably Generals A.G.L. McNaughton, Harry Crerar, and Guy Simonds, the three dominant figures of the war, as well as representative types, including the Great War generation, staff officers, and militia successes. Chapter 9 tries to explain why there were so few French-Canadian general officers. The final chapter draws some conclusions about these men, the Canadian military experience, and the history of Canadian arms.

There are some great men in these pages, as well as some sadly flawed characters. That is what we might expect. The generals jostled for position and power and perquisites, helped their friends, and cursed their enemies, exactly as people in any profession do. None, however foolish, forgot that he was fighting a war and that his decisions, whether made at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, at a training camp in Nova Scotia, at Canadian Military Headquarters in Britain, or in action in Hong Kong, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, directly affected the lives and might cause the deaths of Canadian soldiers. The generals frequently made the wrong decisions, sometimes because politicians pressured them, occasionally because they fooled themselves, and frequently because the German or Japanese enemy was better equipped and better trained than they expected. But they did their best with what they had, and, at the beginning of the war and for some years after, they had very little, as Canada scrambled to make up for its long neglect of the armed forces. Just as effective tanks could not be produced overnight, so able generals could not be conjured up out of nothing. The ill-equipped and ill-trained Permanent Force of 1939, with its 450 regular officers, and the even weaker Non-Permanent Active Militia, with its scarcely trained five thousand amateur officers, could not produce much in September 1939. It took time — and casualties — before the situation could be corrected, before young, able, vigorous officers could emerge. Canada was fortunate that the war situation allowed that time, or our death toll would have been far higher.

And yet, well before the end of war, the First Canadian Army of two corps, with three infantry and two armoured divisions plus two armoured brigades, was as well led, as well equipped, and at least as effective as any Allied force of comparable size anywhere. There was a great national achievement there, one all Canadians ought to know and one too few do. The war against Hitler's Germany had to be fought and it had to be won, and Canada played a substantial part in that great cause. This book is a small contribution in recording that story.

No historian ever works alone, but on this project I received help from a number of colleagues and friends. What struck me from the beginning was how generous this country's best military historians were in offering assistance to someone they might have seen as an enemy infiltrator. Bill McAndrew, Terry Copp, Steve Harris, Serge Bernier, Reg Roy, Jack Hyatt, and LCol John English, distinguished scholars all, offered good advice, freely shared their research materials, and saved me from falling into many ambushes. I owe them a great deal and not least my thanks. Bill McAndrew and Terry Copp also read the whole manuscript in draft to my great benefit, while Steve Harris, Desmond Morton, Fernand Ouellet, and Serge Bernier commented on specific chapters. Paul Dickson, who recently completed his PhD dissertation on General Harry Crerar, must have been nervous about my galloping onto his turf, yet he read my Crerar chapter and helped me, as I tried to assist him, by sharing research. A number of participants in the events of which I write, as well as family members of the generals I cover here, read specific chapters. I am most grateful to Joseph Pope, Major Harry Pope, G/C Victor Stuart, MGen M.P. Bogert, and LGen Henri Tellier, and absolve them of blame for the results.

During my research, I received special assistance from Tim Dube, Paul Marsden, and Barbara Wilson at the National Archives of Canada and from Jacqueline McIvor at the Royal Military College. The Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College, London, the United States Army Military History Institute, the George C. Marshall Library, the Royal Military College Archives, the University of Victoria Archives, the Queen's University Archives, the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, and other repositories in Canada, the United States, and Britain all assisted greatly. The Montgomery Collections Committee of the Imperial War Museum and Viscount Montgomery allowed me to make use of Field Marshal Montgomery's

papers; the trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives permitted my use of their collections. Dozens of retired officers let me badger them with questions about their experiences, and many, as well as the families of general officers, gave me full access to their papers (see selected list of primary sources). This book could not have been written without their interest and generous cooperation. A number of research assistants helped greatly, most notably Penny Bryden and Dean Oliver, as well as Paul Notley, Daniel Robinson, Ernesto Ialongo, and Sally Thomas. The usual suspects among my friends provided assurance, reassurance, leads, and advice. I am particularly grateful to John Saywell, Bob Bothwell, David Bercuson, and Norman Hillmer, the latter three of whom read all or most of the manuscript. Norman and Ann Hillmer, Bill Kaplan and Susan Krever, and Bill Young looked after me well on my repeated research forays to Ottawa. The Blue Jays helped mightily at home by providing a winning distraction.

The research and writing of this book were accomplished while I held a Killam Senior Fellowship and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada research grant, and I am more than pleased to acknowledge this generous assistance that allowed the work to proceed without interruption. The Department of History at York University graciously accommodated itself to my absence. Yet again, Rosemary Shipton's able editing saved me (and my readers) from the worst excesses of my prose style and prevented innumerable errors.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Rod Byers and Barry Hunt, cadets with me at the Royal Military College who became fine scholars, one at York and the other at RMC. It is also dedicated to three of our best teachers at RMC, Don Schurman, J. Murray Beck, and Ezio Cappodocia, who tried to pound some history and political science — and other things — into our heads. I have never forgotten Schurman telling me quite bluntly and quite rightly, at our first meeting, “you are not backward in being forward.” Writing this book has also helped me to come to terms with my time at Le Collège Militaire Royal and at RMC. I now understand more clearly than before how and why this was the formative experience of my life, for good and ill. The dawn may be delayed, but it comes at last.

Finally, Elaine and Carole assisted in so many ways. This book is for them, and always for Michael, too.