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The Suicide Battalion by James L. McWilliams and R. James Steel [Review]

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clothes for even a month will understand how eighteenth century soldiers could be in rags by the end of a campaigning season in the North American wilderness. Only very occasionally, on p.194 for example, Francis Back has portrayed a gaunt, weary, unshaven militiaman in ragged capot and red leggings. For once I had a sense of day-to-day reality.

Critics will also complain that war in Canada did not begin, as does Chartrand's book, with a short chapter on the Vikings and their *skraeling* adversaries. As usual in most survey histories of Canada, many centuries of pre-contact native life have been ignored. The reasons are familiar. The splendid military fashion plates that decorate each chapter would have been hard to create and even harder to authenticate if their subjects had been Cree, Algonquin and Micmac warriors in centuries before the European invasions. One of the few native figures, a portly, full-bearded Inuit leaning on his bow, provides a signature picture for the first chapter. It was borrowed from a 1577 English engraving and certainly not drawn from life. However, visible evidence of aboriginal warfare — broken bones, penetrated skulls and fragmented weapons — exists and could have illustrated that Canada's First Nations did not live in peace and harmony before Europeans landed in their northern Eden.

In its philosophical balance as in its allocation of pages, volume 1 of *Canadian Military Heritage* reflects its Quebecois provenance and target readership. From the table of contents, stationed discreetly at the back, to long sentences that probably sounded better in French than

they do in English, this is not a book that began life in Toronto. Any slight problem is more than outweighed by the obvious commitment to create a beautiful and memorable book. If that was Masse's goal, René Chartrand and Art Global have done him proud.

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The Suicide Battalion

James L. McWilliams and R. James Steel, *The Suicide Battalion*, St. Catherines: Vanwell Publishing, 1993, 228 pages \$14.95.

This is a fascinating and frustrating account of the 46th Canadian Battalion during the First World War. The fascination derives from the depiction of the life of ordinary soldiers in this hard-luck battalion from the Canadian prairies. Initially recruited from Moose Jaw and Regina, the regiment was also known as the South Saskatchewan Regiment — the "suicide" nickname apparently was added later by battalion members. In May 1915, the men of the 46th moved to Camp Sewell, shortly afterwards renamed Camp Hughes in honour of the Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes. Five months later, in October 1915, the 46th sailed to England and became part of the 10th Brigade commanded by the Militia Minister's younger brother St. Pierre Hughes. Al-

most immediately the battalion was broken up and some 800 men were sent to France as replacement drafts for other Canadian battalions already in action.

The great fear of those remaining with the battalion was that they would not rebuild with sufficient speed to go with the rest of the 10th Brigade to France. However, the South Saskatchewan had the bad luck to make the deadline at the expense of its prairie background. Replacements for the 46th were "partially trained men from every corner of the Dominion." When the battalion arrived in France there was little time for additional training. Almost immediately, the South Saskatchewan moved to the Somme battlefield arriving in time for the melancholy attack on Regina Trench.

Initially the attack was a complete failure. But the insufficiently trained and inexperienced 46th Battalion was thrown into the attack. After taking Regina Trench and almost immediately attacking Desire Trench, the battalion was left depleted and exhausted. But the description of this action, using the soldiers' accounts, is fascinating. Mac McDonald's wounding, Jim Butterworth's search for his brother Dick, John Copp sending to the mother of his friend her dead son's signet ring, all of these and other stories — each a wonderful anecdote, convincingly told — make this part of the book completely believable.

Following Regina Trench, indeed for the remainder of the war, the 46th never missed a major action which involved the Canadian Corps. Casualties were usually high, luck was frequently bad, and the men almost beyond words. The publishers "Fact

Sheet" indicates that the "narrative includes many personal accounts, some written seventy or so years ago and others recalled more than half a century later." While these accounts are convincingly quoted, it is impossible to tell where or when they were originally made. For a historian anxious to distinguish contemporary observations from distantly recalled events this is very frustrating. Equally annoying is the fact that the book was written without benefit of recent scholarship on the war. The work on tactics by Bidwell and Graham, Bill Rawling or Tim Travers would have been useful to the authors as would Desmond Morton's accounts of the daily life of soldiers and the "peculiar politics" of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada. The most recent book cited in the bibliography was a 1987 book by Daniel Dancocks; in the notes the most recent title is Sixsmith's 1970 volume on *British Generalship in the Twentieth Century*. Casualty figures often differ from the official history, but no sources for them are cited. Long disproved myths are repeated in the book, and the general context of the war is sometimes unclear. Such frustrations aside, the book is a good read. An interesting and useful appendix provides thumbnail sketches and post war stories of the men and officers mentioned by name in the text.

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A Marchpast of the Canadian Army Past and Present

G.W. Hughes, CD, *A Marchpast of the Canadian Army Past and Present*, 3 Vols, 1692 pages, \$350.00.

At one time, virtually every community in Canada was home to a platoon, company, headquarters or an entire battalion or regiment. Units like the 10th Brant Dragoons, the Prince Albert and Battleford Volunteers, Les Chasseur Canadiens, or the 76th Colchester and Hants Rifles are but a few. Some earned many battle honours overseas, while others never ventured farther than summer camp at Camp Hughes or Petawawa. To many people, a commission in a proud militia regiment was an important achievement. These soldiers provided the basis for army expansion in wartime. Politicians also called upon some regiments to act as an emergency force to maintain order during civil disturbances.

Most of these regiments have disappeared. Force reductions, reduced enrolment, amalgamation, disbandment or deletion have taken their toll. As each unit disappeared, so did a part of our history. Often they left little or no record. Indeed, many books covering the history of Canadian army units trace only the lineage of those regiments and corps that exist today.

The twenty year effort of one military historian has changed all this. The three volume *A Marchpast of the Canadian Army Past and Present* contains the

history of every Canadian regiment and much, much more. Wray Hughes served as a signaler with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in the Second World War. He landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944 and later crossed the Rhine in 1945. Following the war, he served in Korea, the Congo, West Germany and Canada. More recently, he was intimately involved in the planning and initial construction of Calgary's Museum of the Regiments. Military history has always been his love and his encyclopedic memory astonishes everyone he meets. Hughes made use of Army General Orders, Militia Orders, regimental histories, documents and interviews in compiling the extensive information for this book.

Volume 1 covers the corps, such as the Corps of Military Staff Clerks, and cavalry regiments; Volume 2 describes the lineage of over 200 infantry regiments; Volume 3 provides an order of battle of the Canadian army corps, divisions, brigades and reserve battalions in the First and Second World wars. Each regimental entry provides a synopsis of the origin, home station, march, colours, perpetuation, alliances, amalgamations, battle honours and fate of a particular unit. Throughout are excellent images of the various helmet and cap insignia worn and facsimiles of the unit colours. Particularly striking and well produced are the multi-coloured formation patches of the Canadian divisions, which have never been published in colour. A synopsis on each formation is also provided.

Easy reference is assisted by a detailed index, reflecting the theme of each volume. The only flaws are the occasional typo-