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# CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY



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## CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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## From the Editor-in-Chief

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C.P. Stacey, the official historian of the Army in the Second World War, recounts in his memoirs the tale of a disastrous press conference in London in 1943 by defence minister J.L. Ralston. Instead of taking command of the room, as Stacey had seen other Commonwealth ministers do, Ralston deferred completely to a "wretched little British brigadier (one who had failed at every other job, one speculated)" in charge of security. Ralston referred every question from the British press to the brigadier, asking permission to answer – and the "little man always said no." As Stacey reflected, "Here was an admirable sincere and industrious minister who had been selflessly devoting himself to the nation's service for years, and he was utterly incapable of communicating effectively with an audience which was eager to hear him. Had Canada had a war minister (or any other cabinet minister) capable of speaking with some degree of passion and eloquence... many of the government's difficulties would have been alleviated." (*A Date With History* (Ottawa, 1983), pp.121-122)

Certainly Ralston's record was one of towering achievement. Distinguished lawyer, decorated battalion commander on the Western Front in the First World War, defence minister in 1926-30 (he presided over important reforms), finance minister in 1939-40 (he oversaw the critically important financial side of war mobilization), and then defence minister with principal responsibility for the massive expansion of the Army and its entry into intense combat in 1940-44. Yet he is remembered mainly as the principled victim of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who forced Ralston's resignation when the latter called for overseas conscription to fill

the depleted ranks of infantry units in the wake of the Normandy campaign and the Liri Valley and Gothic Line offensives in Italy.

Daniel Byers of Laurentian University takes a long step in balancing our understanding with a study of Ralston's early career, and particularly his service during the First World War. What emerges is a portrait of a man with a deep sense of duty who was both conscientious and modest to a fault. He worried profoundly. What was expected of a public figure? What did others think of him? The piece shows how these traits drove him to courage and effectiveness on the battlefield, which, nevertheless, did nothing to allay his obsession with detail and the need to project a dignified, restrained public image.

Richard Holt, a retired military officer who recently completed his PhD at Western University, has also supplied fresh research on the First World War for this issue, part of a growing body of new work on the manpower of the Canadian forces. He examines a large but hitherto unknown British-Canadian campaign to recruit British citizens living in the United States in 1917-18. The results were substantial – some 57,000 recruits, 33,000 of them for the Canadian Expeditionary Force – but, the piece concludes on the basis of detailed archival research, disappointing in view of the substantial effort, and the fact that many British residents in the US ignored the appeals to volunteer. The real answer, implemented only in the last months of the war, was a British, Canadian and US convention that made citizens of these nations liable to conscription in their country of residence.

In 1982 Bill McAndrew, one of our leading soldiers turned scholar, published a piece in the US journal *Aerospace Historian* that in my opinion remains the foremost account of

the role of the Royal Canadian Air Force in Canadian defence planning during the 1920s and 30s. With Bill's help, and the kind permission of *Aerospace Historian*, we are able to reprint the piece here, with new photographs provided by Mike Bechthold's matchless research. David Moule, of the University of Calgary, also addressed a central issue from the interwar period, the debate in the pages of the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* between future Second World War corps commanders E.L.M. Burns and G.G. Simonds over the proper place of tanks in army organization. As David highlights, both officers revealed convictions that would be important to their wartime commands, Simonds' faith in higher level commanders' ability to exercise close control over a battle, and Burns' equally strong conviction that in the chaos of combat the divisional commander might well be the most senior commander able to influence events.

Blake Seward, Cindy Brown, Alan Sears, and Lee Windsor, of the University of New Brunswick have provided a report and analysis of their experience in leading battlefield tours for high school history teachers. These tours are organized by the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at UNB and the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, with funding generously provided by John Cleghorn. The authors conclude that such historical "staff rides" are as valuable for the professional development of history teachers as they have long been for the professional growth of military personnel.

For the Canadian War Museum section Suzanne Evans has produced an extremely moving account of endurance in the face of privation and misery. Ethel Rogers Mulvany was

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...continued on page 16...