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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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From the Guest Editors

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This year marks the 70th anniversary of Operation Husky and the return of Allied forces to continental Europe in 1943. With perfect hindsight we know that the July 1943 landings in Sicily began a string of hard-fought victories that finally ended the Second World War. But decades after the final defeat of Nazi Germany it is easy to forget how those Allied troops who closed in on Sicily's coastline on 10 July 1943 could not know if that first assault against Fortress Europe would succeed.

This special issue focuses on Canada's contribution to victory in Sicily and forms part of this summer's commemorative events known as Operation Husky 2013, the 70th anniversary citizens' memorial campaign. The articles herein emerge from a larger program of research on Operation Husky supported by the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick, the Laurier Centre, the United States First Division Museum at Cantigny and the Department of Military History at the US Army Command and General Staff College.

The issue opens with a message from Operation Husky 2013's founder and driving force, Steve Gregory, who explains the origin and inspiration behind the effort. This July Steve will lead a march following in the footsteps of Canadian soldiers who fought their way across Sicily, culminating in a remembrance ceremony at the breathtaking Agira Canadian War Cemetery.

The Gregg Centre's Lee Windsor reassesses Canada's role in the multi-national struggle for Sicily, a story overshadowed by Anglo-American tensions and German assertions that they were the real victors after mounting a skillful evacuation from the island in the face of a bungled

Allied pursuit. The green 1st Canadian Division was supposed to play a supporting role alongside veteran British and American formations, but inadvertently found themselves at the centre of events that forced the Germans to quit Sicily after suffering unsustainable losses.

Confirmation of 1st Canadian Division's skill-at-arms came at a hefty price. The campaign directly resulted in 562 Canadian deaths, not including aircrew lost during the battle for air superiority around Sicily in the weeks before D-Day. Matt Douglass and Alexander Fitzgerald-Black, MA students and Maryanne Lewell, a PhD candidate, all at the University of New Brunswick, provide a personal view of these losses through a collection of biographies of some of those men killed in action. The 21 soldiers and aircrew featured represent all the Canadians killed in Sicily and include members from each unit and corps that suffered fatal losses on the island.

The price paid by Sicilians was also heavy as the Gregg Centre's Cindy Brown reveals in her study of Allied Military Government during and after Operation Husky. In spite of mishaps and miscalculations, Allied Military Government officials contributed to Operation Husky by relieving front line units of responsibility for assisting the large civilian population living on or near the battlefield. As the fighting front swept across Sicily, Allied Civil Affairs teams filled in behind to take care of virtually all of the needs of the civilian population from feeding the hungry, burying the dead, fixing the inevitable battle damage, but also restoring civilian life to a minimum functionality.

Wartime Sicily was immortalized in the artwork of William Ogilvie. Matt Symes, a PhD student at Wilfrid Laurier University, writes about the renowned Canadian war artist and his depiction of the Sicily campaign. Symes notes that Ogilvie's paintings

allow the viewer "to interact with the variables of war and sense the emotions of battle" that other mediums – journals, memoirs, letters, historical accounts – cannot. The article features 12 of Ogilvie's works. The issue also includes a Canadian War Museum graphic feature including photographs and war art from their Sicily collection.

Robert Engen, a lecturer at Queen's University and a participant on our 2012 Canadian-American Study Tour of Sicily, provides his impression on this educational experience. The study tour, organized by the Gregg Centre and Laurier Centre, has brought graduate students and soldiers from Canada and the United States together in Sicily annually since 2006 and has fueled much of the research as expressed in this issue.

As always, documentary traces left behind after great events are as intriguing as historians' interpretations of them. Three sample documents from Operation Husky are included in this issue. The first is the divisional reconnaissance squadron after-action report from one of the last Canadian actions in Sicily which broke Axis defences and triggered the German evacuation. The second is a memo from then Brigadier-General Bruce Matthews lauding the performance of Canada's gunners in late July 1943 when fighting in central Sicily became dominated by artillery on both sides. Canadian field batteries responded as best they could against German and Italian heavy guns with longer range. Lastly, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill's proclamation to Italians reminds us that Operation Husky's strategic effect was achieved as much by diplomatic and political means as by military force.

This special edition of *Canadian Military History* is available in English and French thanks to the volunteer efforts of HCol (retd) Bill Cloutier, Elyse Desforges, Carolyn

Hug, Maryanne Lewell, Christiane Lupien, David MacLeod, LGen (retd) Michel Maisonneuve, Pierre-Paul Pharand, Abdul Rajabi, Normand Roberge, Sophie Vadeboncoeur, Christiana Vincelli-Gregory and Daniel Wolfe. Special thanks must also go to Mike Bechthold and Roger Sarty for turning out a fine product. This special Operation Husky issue of *Canadian Military History* was made possible with support from Veterans Affairs Canada.

Lee Windsor and
Cindy Brown
July 2013

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Operation Husky 2013

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In the fall of 2005, my mother – then a spry 80-year-old widow – brought a handsome and charming guest to a Saturday family dinner. At our prodding, Charles Hunter, Bombardier, an original 39er regaled my family with his stories as a young gunner in the Royal Canadian Artillery during the Second World War. My Dad had served in the Air Force during the war and spoke little of it, as was customary for most Canadian veterans after the war. Charles, now 83, let loose a salvo of information at that dinner that rocked our house. We, or should I say “I,” had never heard of Canadians in Sicily. Each town, Pachino, Modica, Valguarnera, Assoro, Nissoria, Agira, Regalbuto, Catenanuova and Adrano has its own story of pain, sacrifice, and triumph.

Two weeks later, Erik my fine son all of 11, announced that his Grade 6 history project would be about the Battle of Assoro. What a fine tribute, I thought. Charles would be honoured.

After weeks of searching, Erik was disappointed at turning up



very little in the way of written testimony to any Canadian presence in Sicily. As parents do, Dad got involved. Scouring the Internet, libraries, and bookstores yielded a troubling impression. The British and Americans had liberated Sicily. At most, the presence of Canadians was mentioned only as a footnote.

I am sure no malice was intended by any of the authors. Patton’s US

7th Army considered us merely as a colony of Britain. Montgomery and his 8th Army saw us as part of their Commonwealth and for all intents and purposes, at least for the occasion, as British. Proud of our heritage and eager to serve the King, we made no effort to correct these misperceptions.

That brings us to today and to Operation Husky 2013 – a civilian project led by Canadians. It is a project dedicated to sons. Firstly my son, who innocently selected this topic for his history assignment and, by doing so, provided the catalyst for this commemoration. The 562 brave Canadian men who died on the hills in Sicily and in the skies overhead were also sons. Most of their parents never read much in the papers about Sicily and the sacrifices of their sons. Most, never heard about their son’s experience in Sicily or any story near the account of history as described in this book. Most, if not all, were never able to visit the site of their son’s grave.

In the summer of 2013, 70 years after the battle for Sicily, we will walk the path taken by these brave men, mark the places of the fallen, and remember those lost on all sides. Canadians, from all over our land, came together to fight in Sicily for what we asked of them in 1943. They fought for freedom against tyranny. They did, and they punched above their weight.

The sacrifice of these men went unrecognized at the time. Nor is it common knowledge in Canada today. This book and project of commemoration may help us change that.

Please, spread the word.
For these sons.

May the souls of the brave Canadians who fought in Sicily and those who died there rest in peace and the memory of their sacrifice live on with us.

Steve Gregory