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"The Greatest Victory: Canada's One Hundred Days, 1918 (Book Review)" by J.L. Granatstein

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from the outset. This book may interest anyone with a fascination for genealogy, Canadian history, American History, the War of 1812 or the imperial periphery. Ultimately, this collection of seemingly oral histories vacillates wildly between nationalist rhetoric, recitation of genealogy and well-written history, but the book serves its editor's intended purpose splendidly.

ZACHARY S. KOPIN, *INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER*

The Greatest Victory: Canada's One Hundred Days, 1918. J.L. Granatstein. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 216.

This is a fine piece of revisionist historiography.

The author made his objective explicit early on. His aim was nothing less than to change the popular perception of the Great War and of the role which Canadians played in it. More particularly, he wished to alter the popular perception that the victory at Vimy in April, 1917 was Canada's major achievement in the Great War (p. xii). He noted further that Vimy is, to a large extent, the only Great War operation most Canadians have heard of (p. xi) and, while not wishing to denigrate in any way, the enormous achievement of the Canadian Corps at Vimy, it was a victory of limited strategic significance and had little effect on the subsequent conduct and outcome of the war (p.xiii). *Au contraire*, argues Granatstein, the victories of the Hundred Days (August 1918 to November 1918) played a crucial role in the weakening, and eventual defeat, of the German army (p.xi). Granatstein builds his case carefully and meticulously, devoting a chapter to each of the important elements in the Hundred Days: the battle of Amiens of 8August 1918 (Ch 1); the breaking of the Drocourt-Queant line (Ch.3); crossing the Canal du Nord (Ch. 4) and finally, the capture of Mons (Ch. 5). Taking part in the capture of Mons meant that Canadians were involved in fighting on 10 and 11 November 1918. Indeed, Canadian soldiers were killed right up until 11:00 a.m. on 11 November 1918 when the Armistice came into effect. No less an authority than the Port Hope Evening Guide published a gross calumny of General Currie in which it was suggested that he had sacrificed the lives of Canadian soldiers right up to the end of the war in order to satisfy his personal ambitions. Currie was, thus,

impelled into a libel action which, as Granatstein has noted (p. 193), led to his premature death.¹

The fascinating thing about studying the Great War during the year of its centennial is observing the complete triumph of revisionist ideas. The established, traditional view of the war as “Monty Python massacre with idiot Graham Chapman generals sending gormless Michael Palin soldiers to a senseless death”² has been extensively revised and, largely, rejected. Granatstein is too much a professional historian to indulge himself by, for example, taking cheap shots at Douglas Haig. He did note that Haig’s overall direction of the British Expeditionary Force was “less than stellar” (p. 86). Hubert Gough, although by no means the worst British general of the war, was definitely the least successful. Granatstein notes that Arthur Currie, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Corps was opposed to letting the corps come under the command of Gough’s Fifth Army because Currie believed Gough “to be incompetent” (p.82).

Granatstein did provide an interesting and useful “Note on Sources” (pp. 204-207). Throughout the volume he followed the original methodological lead of Lyn Macdonald³ in relying on the diaries and letters of soldiers to flesh out the documents.

While I am not an historian, I do find myself constantly angered and baffled by the behaviour of Canadian historians.⁴ I have difficulty avoiding the impression that the Contemporary Canadian historian views besmirching Canada and its institutions to the greatest degree possible as his or her primary obligation. Granatstein, clearly, does not run with the common herd of Canadian historians. His admiration, affection and respect for Canada’s army are palpable.⁵

¹ Robert J. Sharpe, *The Last Day, The Last Hour: The Currie Libel Trial* (Toronto: Carswell, 1988).

² Adam Gopnik, “The Big One: Historians rethink the war to end all wars,” *The New Yorker*, 24 August 2004. Undoubtedly the fullest and most aggressive statement of the revisionist perspective is Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the Great War* (London: Cassell, 2003).

³ Lyn MacDonald, *Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993).

⁴ See the discussion of “pseudo-history” in Robert Ivan Martin, *Free Expression in Canada: Surrendered to Diversity and Multiculturalism* (Mt Vernon, Washington: Stairway Press, 2012), 252-262.

⁵ See J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that Jack Granatstein and I are old friends, having been members of the same class, Class of 1961, at the Royal Military College of Canada.

ROBERT MARTIN, *PROFESSOR OF LAW, EMERITUS, WESTERN UNIVERSITY*

A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War. Isabel V. Hull. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pp. 368.

International law does not often become front-page news, but in March 2015 the seemingly intricate subject gained national attention in Canada in the debate to authorize Canadian airstrikes in Syria. Though some experts pointed out that the decision seemed to violate international law, others argued that the atrocities committed by ISIS militants and the protection of Iraq's sovereignty necessitated the action. The example illustrated just how murky the interpretation of international law can be, even when it is at the centre of major wartime decisions.

Cornell historian Isabel V. Hull's book *A Scrap of Paper* serves as a reminder that in most modern conflicts, no matter how messy or undefined, the realities of international law are never far from the frontlines. The First World War, she argues, was fundamentally shaped by variant understandings of international law, which affected the course and conduct of the war. Hull proves that international law was more than purely political rhetoric or a diplomatic nicety, but that it informed key decisions and reactions and was a central preoccupation of political and military leaders on all sides of the war. Going further, she effectively demonstrates that 1914 essentially represented a legal divide between Imperial Germany and the Allies – specifically France and Britain. On the one hand, the Allies were generally careful to operate within the new framework established in the Brussels and Hague conventions. The Germans, however, were guided by what Hull calls “war positivism.” According to this idea, the exigencies of war require, irrespective of existing legal conventions, practical and particular solutions.

This divide was perhaps best captured in the famous quip that gives the book its title, when German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Holweg dismissed the Treaty of London of 1839, which