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### "Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy, 1944 (Book Review)" by Ben Kite

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If *In Peace Prepared* traces back the institutional development and organizational culture of Canada's early Cold War Army, one of its strengths is the author's ability to show where the army jurisdiction ended and the influence of the political sphere began. Of course, the Canadian Army military problem solving process failed on its own sometimes. But, as the author convincingly argues, the impact of the Canadian political system was one of the many factors that could also affect the process. In fact, even though the Canadian Army developed an effective combat development cycle during the first two decades of the Cold War, it is important to remember that this process existed only to inform and guide civilian politicians and bureaucrats' force development decisions, not control them. When there was a difference of views, especially in time of peace and when the money was scarce, this could bring the politicians to ignore the professional advice received from the military.

Although Godefroy's overall argument and presentation are very strong, one critique can be made with regard to content. It would have been interesting to compare at some point the military problem solving process and the solutions adopted by Canada's Cold War-era allies regarding the problems they all faced. In this way, it would have been easier for the reader to assess the effectiveness of the Canadian combat development process and see that the Canadian Army was able to innovate and adapt at the level as is suggested by the author.

Ultimately, by stressing the evolution of Canadian Army strategic thinking and institutional development as well as what the Canadian Army did to be successful on the new conventional-nuclear battlefield during the first two decades of the Cold War, *In Peace Prepared* is a major addition to Canadian historiography. Written in a clear and compelling style, this work will appeal to academics and professional military personnel who wish to learn how big and complex is the task to plan, establish, build and manage a modern professional army.

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*Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy, 1944*. Ben Kite. Solihull, UK: Helion and Company, 2014. Pp. 488.

Ben Kite's *Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy, 1944* is an interesting perspective of the way the Anglo-Canadians fought the battle of Normandy. As opposed to producing a new account of the battle's operations, Kite examines how the army fought the battle. In so doing he discusses how the soldiers and servicemen would have used their equipment. This also includes the individual specs and uses for the various weapons, an aspect that is often overlooked or quickly glossed over in operational accounts of the pivotal battle of Northwest Europe.

Kite utilizes archival documents such as private papers from the Imperial War Museum, official pamphlets, and unit war records, as well as personal accounts derived from interviews and correspondence with veterans and published memoirs. Secondary sources and pamphlets are employed in conjunction to impart the reader with knowledge about how the military arm were organized and how they were supposed to be employed in the field, while personal vignettes offer glimpses into how such efforts were undertaken. These are interesting glimpses and offer an understanding to the British and Canadian organization in Normandy that will prove valuable to those who study the particular campaign (and likely into the remainder of the war in Northwest Europe) or those who are genuinely interested in the topic. Kite makes great use of veteran voices by the 'usual suspects' of Ken Stout and George Blackburn while the use of the aforementioned papers and interviews provide 'new' voices and allow for fresh glimpses into that summer. Letters such as that of Private R. Hammond of the 1st Battalion The Suffolk Regiment to Major Clark, the surgeon who operated him following the former's "'misfortune of becoming wounded'" in the Falaise Gap, provide important insight (p. 317). If further unpublished letters exist, their inclusion, well contextualized as done by Kite, will undoubtedly shed further light on the period.

Certain nuisances of Helion Publishing such as glossy printing make marginalia difficult, while the index is rather thin given the amount of terms, people, places, items, formations, etc. that are contained within the text. Furthermore, a curious decision was made to make the study of the use of 21st Army Group's armour as the final chapter. This appears odd as the combat aspects of the work are first six chapters, while the topics of intelligence, command, medical services, and summer soldiering that summer were explored in the interim. Lacking their own proper titular chapter is the service corps, yet their role is mentioned at various times throughout.

*Stout Hearts* examines the experience of the British and Canadian units in the battle of Normandy, yet little was used in terms of secondary Canadian sources. This is glaringly evident with the exclusions of Richard Engen's *Canadians Under Fire* (2009) and Terry Copp and Mark Osbourne Humphries' *Battle Exhaustion*, while George Blackburn's *The Guns of Normandy* and Reginald Fendick's *A CANLOAN officer – The memoir of a Canadian Junior Officer On Loan to the British Army for the Liberation of Europe* offer personal accounts of Canadians during the Battle of Normandy.

The medical chapter is perhaps the most interesting for this reviewer, likely stemming from a fond appreciation of the television series *M\*A\*S\*H* and never pursuing the medical branch as a field of study. This chapter showcases the efforts made to preserve the lives of soldiers after their initial wounding. This is of particular importance for educators who are in the practice of having students write biographical sketches of soldiers who were killed, which allows students to further elaborate on the care that their soldier would have received in the days following their initial wounds.

*Stout Hearts* is lengthy and therefore not likely to be of much assistance to those who teach at the middle school level, but certainly at advanced high school courses and the undergraduate level where such projects are becoming more common. This will allow students to develop an understanding of the role that their particular soldier, seaman, or airman played during the Battle of Normandy and likely elsewhere if examining a casualty in a different European theatre. For graduate students and academics examining a particular type of unit, Kite's estimation of the unit is in question. In it he discusses how units were supposed to operate in their given role and provides accounts as to how these were accomplished in practice. As Terry Copp has noted, effectiveness rather than doctrine often mattered and there is most certainly examples where the result achieved did not align with doctrine.<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that this is an overview on *how* 21st Army Group fought and how individual units met the methods explained by Kite are certainly open for comparison and investigation.

As a work of history, the armour chapter reads as the most well researched, with further attention made to the development of vehicles, tactics, and doctrine in the years and months prior to the Battle of

<sup>1</sup> Terry Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 131.

Normandy. This is an aspect omitted for other topics. Indeed, there is little to no mention of types of lessons learned or identified from earlier operations and other campaigns. An engagement with the historiography is also not evident pertaining to the use of the PIAT (Projectile, Infantry Anti-Tank). The weapon is unfavourably reviewed in the text as having been unpopular and recounts an instance where a British Company Sergeant Major had difficulty in achieving success with the weapon. The first attempt the bomb bounced off the front and the second the bomb fell-off after coming into contact with a stalk from a hedge. The third effort “put paid to the Panther” (p. 34). Kite notes that the weapon was not popular, it accounted for six per cent of German tanks destroyed in Normandy compared to the RAF’s seven per cent. Furthermore, Robert Engen’s examination of 161 Canadian infantry officers’ battle experience questionnaires found that 141 officers’ units had used the PIAT and seventy-four of those found the weapon to be ‘outstandingly effective’ compared to three who viewed oppositely.<sup>2</sup> This is a particular instance where noted above that further examination of the topics discussed may yield different results, but the thesis as a whole of explaining how each element of 21st Army Group operated still stands while additional examples can highlight the difficulties in adhering to established doctrine and the reaction to opposition when tasks could not be performed as expected or practiced but still managed to pull through.

*Stout Hearts* is a mammoth undertaking in discussing how the military components of 21st Army Group and supporting naval and air elements were to fight the battle of Normandy. Kite highlights neither successes nor failures, but instead discusses the idea behind the machinations of 21st Army Group, compiled within a single volume. This work can be used as an educational tool and reference guide. Ultimately, *Stout Hearts* furthers our understanding of the complexities and intricacies of 21st Army Group during the Battle of Normandy.

MATTHEW DOUGLASS

*Merry Hell: The Story of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914–1919.* Captain Robert N.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Engen, *Canadians Under Fire: Infantry Effectiveness in the Second World War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 166–169.