

## Canadian Military History

---

Volume 27 | Issue 2

Article 5

---

10-17-2018

### "Creating Canada's Peacekeeping Past (Book Review)" by Colin McCullough

Thirstan Falconer

---

#### Recommended Citation

Falconer, Thirstan (2018) "'Creating Canada's Peacekeeping Past (Book Review)" by Colin McCullough," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol27/iss2/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

Colin McCullough. *Creating Canada's Peacekeeping Past*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016. Pp. 255.

Historian Colin McCullough writes that "Canada was a peacekeeping nation" and that its peacekeeping legacy is rooted in the past (p. 3). That peacekeeping is a celebrated and persistent feature of Canadian identity inspired McCullough to explore how the phenomenon influenced Canadian history since 1956. McCullough's study is not an exploration of the Canadian military's international peacekeeping missions nor is it an assessment of how diplomats and politicians negotiated Canada's place in peacekeeping operations. Rather, *Creating Canada's Peacekeeping Past* is a cultural history of how Canadians came to see Canada as a peacekeeping nation since Lester Pearson played a role in the creation of the first United Nations Emergency Force during the Suez Crisis. McCullough argues that peacekeeping was not adopted into Canada's national identity through "a desire to prevent the escalation of conflicts" but instead through "the employment of a litany of words, images, and objects about peacekeeping throughout Canadian society and culture after 1956" (p. 5). McCullough assesses contributions from politicians, artists, writers, editors, publishers, and teachers in the construction of a peacekeeping mythology within the negotiation of Canadian identity.

McCullough's study contributes to a growing historiography that dissects Canadian culture after 1945. José Igartua's *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971* (2006), Paul Litt's *Trudeaumania* (2016) and Christopher Dummitt's *Unbuttoned: A History of Mackenzie King's Secret Life* (2017), for example, all probe changes in Canadian society during this era. McCullough's recent monograph situates itself within a collection of scholarship that investigates how Canadians saw themselves after the Second World War. This cultural history of Canada's peacekeeping identity is the product of a thorough investigation of political speeches, high school history textbooks, National Film Board documentaries, newspaper articles and editorials, and newspaper editorial cartoons, as well as monuments and other forms of commemoration. McCullough relies on public opinion polling to determine the presence of peacekeeping in the psyche of Canadians.

In the first chapter, McCullough surveys the political rhetoric around peacekeeping from 1956 through to 1997 and argues that "peacekeeping managed to transcend partisan lines" and earned its

status as a symbol of Canadian national identity (p. 26). Diefenbaker, according to McCullough, deployed peacekeeping rhetoric in the wake of Canada's role in solving the Suez Crisis that emphasised the creation of a "world police force" (p. 34). Yet he criticises the former prime minister for invoking rhetoric with little action to support it. Pearson, on the other hand, linked peacekeeping with Canada's national identity as a tool for unity and international peace, but failed to achieve measurable results with missions in the Congo, Cyprus and the Middle East. Nonetheless, during the 1960s "peacekeeping became more than a constructive policy or a way to dream about a peaceful future" (p. 51). This warm embrace of Canada's past allowed peacekeeping to survive during periods of sporadic government support under Prime Ministers Pierre Trudeau, Brian Mulroney, and Jean Chrétien.

In Chapter Four McCullough examines the English- and French-language newspaper coverage of peacekeeping operations between 1956 and 1997. "Canada's newspapers," McCullough argues, "provided the language and imagery that linked peacekeeping to the country's national identity" (p. 111). In particular, McCullough writes that newspapers advanced notions that peacekeeping was the measure of both the best and the worst of Canadian international action. In driving dialogue between peacekeeping operations, political rhetoric and local audiences, peacekeeping was framed in domestic terms. Newspapers emphasised the importance of peacekeeping for Canada's international reputation rather than its value to the nations where peacekeepers were being sent. While McCullough makes periodic reference to "Liberal papers" and "Conservative papers," his analysis ignores the critical relationships between Pearson and influential members of the press during this era. These relationships have already been explored by Patrick Brennan in *Reporting the Nation's Business: Press Government Relations During the Liberal Years, 1935-1957* (1994) and John English in his two-volume biography on the former Liberal prime minister (1989 and 1992). A discussion of how Pearson's friends in the press portrayed Canada's peacekeeping efforts during the Diefenbaker and Pearson years would have elevated the significance of this chapter.

In the subsequent chapter, McCullough surveys newspaper editorial cartoons. Unlike articles and editorials from newspapers, McCullough asserts that newspaper editorial cartoons were more critical of Canada's peacekeeping role. They presented peacekeeping

as something complex and “created a space in which the Canadian attachment to peacekeeping could be challenged, if only in a limited context” (p. 144). Cartoons depicted commentary on the host nations, Canada’s peacekeeping imagery, and on the peacekeepers as people Canadians identified with. McCullough states that newspaper editorial cartoons were the most frequently viewed sections of editorial pages. However, to support this claim, the chapter’s analysis relies on a footnote that traces back through two other secondary sources to a 1980s media study of newspaper editorial pages. This reference forms the entire basis of McCullough’s evidence that editorial cartoons were influential to readers on any topic, let alone peacekeeping topics. Whether this was true in the 1980s, readers cannot be sure as McCullough avoids any investigation of the original media study which would have bolstered the methodological premise of the chapter. Furthermore, the methodological underpinning of the chapter is precarious because McCullough assumes that the same conclusions drawn from the 1980 report apply to the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1990s. It is disputable then that “editorial cartoons played a role in creating and disseminating images of peacekeeping in Canada that contained elements of the fantastic while often resonating with their audiences” (p. 144). McCullough provides no evidence to measure this argument. Though McCullough’s overview of editorial cartoons is an interesting way of examining peacekeeping mythology in Canada, more evidence is required to support the methodological foundations of this chapter.

Colin McCullough’s *Creating Canada’s Peacekeeping Past* carefully tackles the Canadian conception of its own peacekeeping identity and echoes the work of other Canadian cultural historians. McCullough’s investigation of Canada’s peacekeeping identity is bolstered by a collection of primary sources that offer valuable evidence of how Canada came to conceive of itself. Though the study leaves the reader occasionally wanting more, McCullough demonstrates how cultural histories can rejuvenate topics rooted in diplomatic and military histories. This book will be of value to scholars interested in peacekeeping or Canadian identity during the post-Second World War era. Furthermore, McCullough offers valuable insights to those lecturing undergraduates on Canada and peacekeeping operations during this period.

THIRSTAN FALCONER, *CENTRE ON FOREIGN POLICY & FEDERALISM, ST. JEROME’S UNIVERSITY*