

Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

Serge Bernier *et al.*, eds. — « Le Canada et les guerres au XX^e siècle » in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*. Vendôme: Les Presses Universitaires de France, n^o 157, janvier 1990. Pp. 102.

Even more than in English-speaking Canada, military history in French Canada has depended on a tiny contingent of scholars employed by the Department of National Defence. Working for years as a distinct unit under Dr. Jean Pariseau, Francophone historians in the Directorate of History busied themselves with bilingualism, aid to the civil power and, in the *Annales* tradition, an immensely detailed study of the members of the 22nd Battalion, the main French-language unit of the Canadian Corps from 1915 to 1919.

Edited by Serge Bernier, Pariseau's successor, « Le Canada et les guerres » marks a welcome reconciliation of the Directorate. It is a collection of papers from both French- and English-speaking members of the Directorate. Serge Bernier himself has surveyed Canadian military historiography since 1975 with a brisk distribution of praise and blame. Bill McAndrew has contributed a chapter of his forthcoming book with Terry Copp on battle exhaustion among Canadians in the Italian campaign. Roger Sarty, collaborating with Donald Schurman, has previewed part of the official history of the Royal Canadian Navy, emphasizing the conflict between proponents of a "real navy" and the realists who accepted the primacy of convoy escort work. Jean-Pierre Gagnon has transferred his statistical methods from the 22nd Battalion to the 713 French Canadians he managed to find in the infantry battalions of the First Contingent. An outsider to the Directorate, Paul Létourneau, an historian at the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, has reviewed wartime Canadian political and public opinion about Nazi Germany. Quebeckers seem to have shared the same illusions as their fellow Canadians about the durability of Allied unity.

While little in the collection will strike an informed Canadian reader as particularly new, few of the intended readers probably know much about Canada or its role in the world wars. In that respect, broad-ranging articles like the Sarty-Schurman essay on the RCN may be more valuable than narrower accounts. Canadian critics might wonder at some of Bernier's judgements and the absence of such respectable contributors as Dennis and Shelagh Whitaker. Gagnon's contribution, the most original in the collection, is weakened by his reluctance to relate his numbers to already known facts. The French-speaking company in the 14th Battalion would have come as no surprise to him had he read C.G. Power's memoirs or the unit history. Its notorious problems persuaded Sir Arthur Currie that French-language conscripts should form no more than platoon-sized units.

The readership of *Guerres mondiales* have a generous sample of the work of their French-speaking colleagues in Canada since just about all of them are represented, a contrast noted in his introduction by Jean Pariseau. A decade ago, in a larger collection, only Bernier was represented. On fait du progrès !

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Jean-Paul Bled — *Rodolphe et Mayerling*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989. Pp. 306.

Hindsight is the sin of historians. It is difficult to write about *fin de siècle* Austro-Hungary without falling into clichés. Did the mood of political helplessness and artistic irrationality inevitably presage the multinational empire's decline and breakup? Or was it rather a period of liberating modernism? Again, does its model of *Mittel-europa* have something to teach us today, or is it merely a nostalgic utopia? Was its disappearance determined by history through its creaky make-up? Were the Anschluss and Holocaust merely outcomes of its complex history?

Luckily, Jean-Paul Bled takes the education, career, and 1889 suicide of the heir to the throne, Archduke Rudolph, on their own historical terms. A professor of contemporary history at the University of Strasbourg, president of the Study Group for the Habsburg Monarchy, and director of the journal *Études danubiennes*, Bled has launched a veritable explosion of books about Austro-Hungary over the past three years. In 1987, he published a biography of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austro-Hungary; the next year, a study about the foundations of Austrian conservatism between 1859 and 1879; and now, an account of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria and his suicide in 1889. This last book, under review here, appeared on the hundredth anniversary of this tragic event, and joined a vast stream of other books on this romantic topic, some literary and some historical in nature.

A reading of this fascinating and well-written book turns one's mind to the situation of so many other crown princes, whether Charles of Britain or sons of industrial magnates, who are forced to wait for so long before they come to power because of long-lived and independent fathers. Bled admits in his conclusion that the life and death of Rudolph and his admirer Maria Vetsera were without great political import. It was hardly likely that Rudolph would have come to the throne, even without the suicide. If he had, his reign would probably have been a failure because he was cut off from many of the historical roots of this complicated federal system.

For Rudolph, at thirty, was already morally and physically at the end of his tether. Depressed by the empire's return to conservatism, isolated from state affairs by his imperial father, and ridden with disease as a result of his indiscriminate love life, Rudolph would, in any case, most likely not have outlasted his older but healthier father, who died in 1916. His desperate act of murder-suicide in 1889 probably only hastened his own approaching death.