Using the Legacy of World War I to Evaluate Canadian Military Leadership in World War II

Erin M. K. Weir

University of Calgary

CDFAI Submission

January 19, 2004

Recent Canadian military history has not been kind to the men who led Canada's Army in World War II. While Canadian authors lavished praise on their country's heroes for three decades or more following the conflict, they have adopted an increasingly critical tone since then. Generals Andrew McNaughton, Eedson Burns, and George Kitching have been charged with incompetence. Generals Harry Crerar, Guy Simmonds, and Chris Vokes have been damned by faint praise. At best, Canada's senior army officers were capable military administrators, but uninspired battlefield commanders. At worst, they were complete failures.

On what evidence have these dismal judgements been rendered? Presumably, Canadian generals could be evaluated only by comparison with other Allied generals leading troops in similar circumstances. However, Canadian generals performed very different roles from the British and American generals they fought alongside in Italy and northwestern Europe. The commander of the First Canadian Army, for example, was not simply *an* Allied army commander, but *the* Canadian national commander. Canadian generals thus had to satisfy a set of political criteria that cannot be applied to their Anglo-American counterparts, who served simply as military officers in much larger armed forces. Other minor Allied powers, such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, faced some of the same political circumstances as Canada, but their forces were not organized into national armies and did not mostly fight in the same military campaigns as the Canadians.[1] Credible comparisons between Canadian generals and those of other nationalities are therefore difficult to make and, in any case, have not been systematically attempted.

In the absence of synchronic comparisons, the performance of Canada's Army in the Second World War has largely been judged against the legacy of the Canadian Corps in the First World War. The view that Canadians were perhaps less effective than other Allied forces in World War II is contrasted with the notion that they were the most innovative and successful

[1] They mostly fought in northern Africa, Greece, and southern Asia, but the New Zealanders and South Africans also fought in Italy. Allied orders of battle in John Ellis, *World War II: A Statistical Survey* (New York: Facts On File, 1995), 126-127.

Allied soldiers in World War I. The apparent mediocrity of Canadian generals in the second conflict is underscored by Arthur Currie's legendary status in the first. This paper analyzes the extent to which the legacy of the Canadian Corps in World War I provides a relevant benchmark for evaluating Canadian military leadership in World War II. It argues that, while Canadian military leaders faced the same basic issues in both conflicts, these issues manifested themselves as resolvable dilemmas in the first war, but not in the second. The legacy of World War I is therefore of limited value in assessing the performance of Canadian officers in World War II.

If one accepts Clausewitz's dictum that "war is simply the continuation of policy by other means,"[2] then an examination of the challenges facing Canadian generals must begin with an analysis of Canadian policy. The primary military policy of most countries is simply to defend their territory against foreign invasion. For Canada, this meant fighting off the Americans. Indeed, British North America was as much a product of the American Revolutionary War as the United States. Canadian nationhood received its baptism by fire in the American invasion of 1812. Canadian Confederation was largely a response by the British Colonies to the threat posed by the southern Republic that facilitated Fenian Raids into their territory, proclaimed "Manifest Destiny" as its national policy, and had been intensively militarized by its Civil War.

But, by the turn of the century, it was obvious that the United States was not going to invade and that, if it did, Canada could not stop it. This gave rise to what Desmond Morton calls, "the paradox of being simultaneously indefensible and invulnerable."[3] Canada was indefensible in the sense that its population and material resources were too small, and too thinly spread over its vast territory, to resist an invasion. Canada was invulnerable in the sense that the only country it borders was not going to invade and that whatever minuscule chance of a transoceanic invasion from abroad may have existed was nullified by British naval supremacy. This paradox implied another: that Canadian defence policy was no longer to defend Canada.

---

[2] Carl von Clausewitz (ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret), *On War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 28.
[3] Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, Fourth Edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), xi.

Canada could respond to this strange state of affairs in two different ways. On the one hand, it could pursue Canadian interests externally by projecting militarily effective forces abroad. On the other hand, it could pursue Canadian interests internally by structuring the military with respect to domestic political considerations. Although the precedent for Canadian forces serving overseas had been set in the South African War (1899-1902),[4] there was never a clear consensus as to which path Canadian defence policy should take. The most famous manifestations of the tension between overseas fighting power and domestic politics were the conscription crises in both World Wars, in which the Canadian government had to decide whether maximizing Canada's external military power by drafting men to serve overseas was worth inflaming internal divisions between English and French citizens at home.

The conscription question was beyond the scope of Canada's generals and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper. However, the same tension between military effectiveness and domestic politics created three principal dilemmas for Canada's military leadership: professional organization versus militia organization, meritocracy versus patronage, and allied integration versus national independence.

Clearly, a professional army would be best able to serve as an expeditionary force and thus project Canadian military power abroad. However, a militia would better serve domestic political concerns. A force of part-time militiamen would be cheaper to maintain than one of full-time professional soldiers. A militia spread across the country would be more able than a concentrated professional force to perform politically popular duties other than fighting, such as emergency relief. In the event of war, a dispersed militia system "also ensured the more even distribution of potential casualties nationally."[5]

At the outbreak of World War I, the tension between professional and militia organization was exemplified by Canada's two alternative mobilization plans. One "called for fielding

---

[4] Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1993), 32 and 52.

[5] John English, *Lament for an Army: The Decline of Canadian Military Professionalism* (Concord, Ontario: Irwin, 1998), 14.

composite units drawn from various militia regiments," while the other "recommended basing the infantry division on existing reserve militia regiments." Ultimately, the government rejected both approaches and simply summoned Canadian militia battalions to Valcartier, Quebec, where they were haphazardly organized on the spot.[6]

There is general agreement that the Canadian Corps was hugely successful in galvanizing men recruited through the militia system into a professional fighting force during the conflict,[7] but the administrative issue of professional versus militia organization re-emerged after the war. While it was obvious that the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) would be disbanded, many officers hoped to preserve the professionalism it had fostered. In 1919, a committee chaired by General William Otter was formed "to make recommendations as to the incorporation of CEF units into the militia" in an attempt to combine the military effectiveness of a professional army with the domestic benefits of a militia.[8]

The second dilemma facing Canadian military leaders in World War I was the conflict between meritocracy and patronage. In some countries, the existence of an entrenched military class, an accepted national doctrine, and an established martial tradition pre-determined much of the way the war was fought. The absence of these factors in Canada created a vacuum that could be filled either by a meritocracy unchecked by entrenched individuals and concepts or by a patronage system designed for the benefit of certain domestic interests. The South African War had set a precedent for Canadian forces as an innovative meritocracy. For example, Canadian mounted troops pioneered the use of single-line, rather than double-rank, formations in the field and the use of revolvers to prosecute the guerrilla war at close quarters.[9] However, Sam Hughes, Canada's Militia Minister from the Borden government's election in 1911 until his dismissal in

---

[6] Ibid.
[7] For example, Patrick Brennan, "Byng's and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), 5-16.
[8] John English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 19.
[9] Brian Reid, *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell, 1996), 35.

1916, exemplified the rampant patronage that had dominated Canadian politics in the nineteenth century.[10] It is alleged, for example, that he chose Valcartier for the new army camp "largely for reasons related to awarding contracts to friends, for Petawawa [the existing army camp] was a superior functioning training area."[11]

During World War I, Canada's military leadership was highly successful in overcoming the degenerating influence of Hughes' patronage and establishing the Canadian Corps as an innovative meritocracy. Patrick Brennan judges "the establishment of the merit principal in promotion" to be one of "two factors [that] proved essential" to the success of the Corps.[12] As a result, the Canadians used new weapons like machine guns and mortars in larger concentrations and more effective ways than other Allied armies did.[13] They were second only to the Australians in developing aggressive raiding and patrolling tactics.[14] A Canadian officer, Raymond Brutinel, raised the 1st Canadian Automobile Brigade when the war began. Over the course of the conflict, he developed it into the Canadian Independent Force - consisting of two motor machine-gun brigades, a field artillery battery, an engineer company, a cyclist battalion, and a mortar unit. This force "was the first mechanized formation in the Commonwealth armies and the forerunner of the armoured division." McNaughton, then a Canadian artillery officer, made pioneering use of aerial reconnaissance, flash-spotting, and sound-ranging.[15]

The third dilemma was the issue of national independence versus allied integration. Domestic interests wanted Canadian forces to be grouped together into a national army commanded by Canadian officers, rather than dispersed among British armies and partially led by British officers. The former structure would give Canada more control over Canadian forces and make Canada's contribution to the war effort more prominent, giving the Canadian government

---

[10] Stephen Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 103-121.
[11] English, *Lament for an Army*, 14.
[12] Brennan, "Byng's and Currie's Commanders," 5.
[13] English, *Failure in High Command*, 16.
[14] Ibid., 18.
[15] Ibid., 17.

more recognition and influence among the Allied states. It was also hoped that identifiably "Canadian" military achievements would help sustain popular support for the war effort and strengthen national pride more generally.

However, allowing Canadian units to be dispersed among British armies and led by British officers could have been more effective militarily. In fighting the Germans on a continuous, extended front, Commonwealth forces would be most successful if they had the latitude to freely shift troops anywhere along the front and to deploy them in any configuration. The need to keep the Canadians together would impose a limitation on Commonwealth strategy. Also, where experienced Canadian officers were not available, Canadian formations would be more effectively commanded by experienced Britons than by inexperienced Canadians. Essentially, the Commonwealth faced an optimization problem of seeking to achieve as much as possible with finite resources. Requiring that all Canadian forces be deployed together and that they be commanded by Canadian officers would impose additional constraints on the problem, which would reduce the achievable optimum.

General Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps, reconciled national independence with allied integration. On the one hand, he resisted nationalist initiatives that would have reduced military effectiveness. He retained successful British officers in high-ranking positions despite pressure to replace them with Canadians.[16] The leadership was Canadianized over the course of the war only as Canadian officers proved themselves and gained experience. It was also proposed that Canada reduce its divisions from four to three brigades (as other countries had done) to create a larger number of smaller Canadian divisions so that, on paper, the Canadian Corps could become an Army. Currie rejected this plan, opting for the military benefits of keeping Canadian divisions strong over the political desire to have a "Canadian Army."[17]

On the other hand, Currie satisfied the demand for an independent national force by keeping the Corps together. He was even able to derive military benefit from this political

[16] English, *Lament for an Army*, 16.
[17] Ibid. 17.

requirement by using "the inestimable advantage of permanently allocated divisions . . . to develop a military cohesion and operational capacity that can only ever result from soldiers constantly working and living together."[18]

The Canadian Corps established itself as a "cadillac formation."[19] The role it played from 1916 onwards as the spearhead of several successful Allied offensives, particularly in the "Hundred Days" of 1918,[20] constituted a brilliant synthesis between national independence and allied integration. The Canadian Corps played a significant and identifiable role, earning the country international recognition and a seat at the Versailles peace conference. Its victories, especially Vimmy Ridge, fostered a sense of national pride and accomplishment in Canada. By serving as an offensive spearhead, the Canadian Corps also performed a specialized function as a component of the larger Allied military machine. Descriptions of the Corps as the "shock army of the British Empire"[21] reflect both its national distinctiveness and its integration into a broader imperial force.

During World War I, Canada's military leaders not only resolved the dilemmas they confronted but did so in ways that most historians see as being innovative and appropriate. First, Canadian officers reconciled an army built on the militia system with the need for a professional fighting force. Second, they ensured that meritocracy, rather than patronage, would fill the void left by Canada's lack of military tradition. Third, they synthesized the concept of an independent national force with that of integration into a larger allied force. The challenges confronting Canada's armed forces had been created by a conflict between the requirements of military effectiveness and those of domestic politics. Currie and his subordinates proved able to serve both sets of interests remarkably well.

It is against the relatively high benchmark of World War I that the men who led Canada's Army in World War II have been found wanting. But is this a fair comparison? To be sure, as

---

[18] Ibid., 16.
[19] Ibid., 17.
[20] English, *Failure in High Command*, 13.
[21] English, *Lament for an Army*, 10.

the resurfacing of the conscription crisis illustrated, the tension between external military effectiveness and internal political considerations was common to both wars. This tension also implied the same basic issues for Canada's military. However, a closer examination reveals that these issues did not create resolvable dilemmas in World War II as they had in World War I. Canada's military leadership in the second conflict therefore should not be evaluated against the standard of innovative problem-solving set during the first.

General Otter had encountered great difficulty in fusing the Canadian Corps with the Canadian militia.[22] The issue of professional versus militia organization reasserted itself. During the inter-war years, the Permanent Force and the Militia squabbled over limited defence funding. This inter-service rivalry was partly responsible for the mediocre condition of Canada's forces in 1939.

While the problems that had been created by this rivalry undoubtedly continued to affect the Canadian military during World War II, the issue of professional versus militia organization disappeared as soon as war broke out. The Government of Canada declared a policy of "limited liability" in September 1939.[23] Much like the British doctrine on which it was based, this strategy emphasized the use of naval and air power to avoid the deployment of a large land force abroad. Small numbers of ground troops would be employed judiciously according to Basil Liddell Hart's "indirect approach" and the horrors of World War I would not be repeated.[24] In other words, Canada would not mobilize large numbers of militiamen to fight pitched land battles on European fields. Even if this initial decision to deploy only smaller, more technically sophisticated forces was not subsequently adhered to, it clearly cast the die in favour of a professional army and against the militia system.

Also in September 1939, the government opted not to send the Permanent Force overseas. In an attempt to avoid the conscription question, it formed the Canadian Active Service Force,

---

[22] English, *Failure in High Command*, 19.
[23] Jack Granatstein, "Canada: Armed Forces," in I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot, eds., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 145.
[24] English, *Failure in High Command*, 21-23.

made up entirely of men who volunteered to serve overseas. This decision gave rise to a strange scenario in which whole regiments had to pass out of the Permanent Force and then volunteer *en mass* for the Active Service Force.[25] However, establishing a new and separate administration for the army units sent abroad effectively mollified conflict between the Permanent Force and the Militia.

Declaring a policy of limited liability and creating an Active Service Force did not undo the damage done to Canada's Army by inter-war conflict between the Permanent Force and the Militia. However, these actions did remove the issue of professional versus militia organization from the Canadian military's agenda as soon as the war began. While Canada's World War I officers are credited with reconciling a militia force with the need for a professional army, Canada's World War II officers had no such dilemma to resolve.

The second major dilemma resolved in the First World War was meritocracy versus patronage. During the Second World War, Canada again had to build a large officer corps from a very small base. This rapid expansion created a vacuum that could have been filled by either meritocracy or patronage. However, the blatant partisan patronage exemplified by Sam Hughes no longer existed in Canada. It was now a given that the merit principle should apply to the promotion of officers.

In fact, under the leadership of General McNaughton, the Canadian Army selected officers largely on the basis of scholarly achievement and performance on written exams. Some have argued that this "scientific" system was a form of academic patronage, rather than a genuine meritocracy. It could be viewed as patronage in the sense that McNaughton's system favoured officers who shared his scholarly aptitude, but were not necessarily qualified to lead men in battle.[26]

---

[25] David Bercuson, *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001),150.

[26] For more on this, see Geoffrey Hayes, "Science and the Magic Eye: Innovations in the Selection of Canadian Army Officers, 1939-1945," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter 1995/96), 275-295.

However, McNaughton did not choose to favour those with academic credentials over those who would have made better officers. His system simply relied on those criteria that were readily measurable. Unfortunately, many of the most important attributes for military leadership are not testable. In World War I, the fact that the Canadian Army was more or less continuously engaged allowed General Currie to institute a meritocracy based on performance in the field. In World War II, no part of the Canadian Army was continuously engaged until the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and most was not engaged until after the Normandy invasion in June 1944. For most of the war, McNaughton was forced to select officers on bases other than actual battlefield performance. Within this context, the Canadian Army was a meritocracy, albeit a necessarily imperfect one.

This is not to deny that McNaughton and others were guilty of some favouritism on a personal level. However, this sort of interpersonal politics has always existed and probably will always exist in armies. It stands out in the history of World War II only because Canada's Army was expected to be an untainted meritocracy. By contrast, Currie's favouritism in World War I is eclipsed by Hughes's outright patronage.

In World War I, the Canadians were part of a relatively even struggle between the Allies and the Germans for several years. Failure in command could, and unfortunately often did, result in bloody defeats. In World War II, the Canadians were not continuously engaged until after the Allies had built up a tremendous superiority over the Germans. Failures in command still generally produced victories. For example, historians have retrospectively criticized General Vokes for not bypassing Ortona in Italy[27] and General Simmonds for not closing the Falaise Gap in France quickly enough.[28] But the Canadians won both of these battles, and Vokes and Simmonds were credited with military victories at the time. The test of battle was less severe and less clear as an indicator of merit in the Second World War because the struggle was lopsided by

---

[27] For example, Brereton Greenhous, "'Would it Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely . . . ?': A Canadian Christmas, 1943," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (April, 1989), 51-55.
[28] For example, English, *Failure in High Command.*

the time Canadians entered the fray.

The difficulties of officer recruitment and promotion in World War II echoed the World War I question of meritocracy versus patronage. However, it did not manifest itself as a resolvable dilemma in the second war. While a meritocracy was the ideal, merit was difficult to assess because the Canadians were initially not engaged and then engaged on very uneven terms. Outright political patronage did not exist as it had previously; there was only the sort of personal favouritism that exists in every organization. In the First World War, Canadian generals were able to make a clear choice for meritocracy and against patronage. In the Second World War, they had to steer a nebulous course based on more ambiguous notions of merit and a more subtle but pervasive type of favouritism.

The third issue to be examined is that of national independence versus allied integration. In both wars, the Canadian government wanted an independent Canadian force, while the British leadership wanted a free hand in deploying Canadian troops. However, in World War II, this conflict did not reflect the tension between domestic politics and military effectiveness as it had in World War I. To be sure, the Canadian government's desire for an independent force was motivated by the same political considerations as before. However, there was much less military benefit to allied integration than there had been in World War I.

As is noted above, the benefit of integration in the First World War was that it would allow the Allies to freely shift and deploy troops in different configurations along the extended front on which they faced the Germans. No such front existed during most of the Second World War. Instead, Allied troops were deployed in a few blocks outside occupied Europe. There was no need for these blocks to cut across national lines. Since a large body of Allied troops was needed in Britain, there was no military reason to disperse the Canadians between various theatres, rather than concentrating them in England as "a dagger pointed at the heart of Berlin."[29] In fact, when the Canadians were broken into smaller contingents and sent elsewhere, such as to

[29] Jack Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 73.

Hong Kong and Dieppe, the results could hardly be described as militarily effective.

Between 1940 and 1943, concentrations of troops were needed in both England and Egypt. Dominion troops would supplement British forces in both areas. Based on climate and terrain, it made sense to deploy the Canadians to England and the Australians and New Zealanders to Egypt. It was also logistically much easier to move troops from Canada to England and from Australasia to Egypt than from Canada to Egypt and from Australasia to England. Theoretically, the Canadians could have been divided between England and Egypt, but there was no reason to do so. The political need to keep Canadian forces together did not impose a military cost on the Allies.

The only occasion on which there was a military reason to divide Canadian forces was the invasion of Italy in 1943. It made sense for a Canadian contingent to participate in this campaign, particularly since the Australians had been redeployed to the Pacific.[30] But the Canadian government readily agreed to detach forces from the First Canadian Army in England for this purpose. There are no major instances of Canada keeping its forces together to the detriment of Allied operations.

Why then did the British question keeping Canadian forces together and push for a free hand to deploy them differently? On one level, this may have been a matter of administrative convenience. More importantly, Britain had a political interest in breaking up the First Canadian Army and integrating Canadian units into a larger Commonwealth force. During World War II, there was a "shift in power from Britain to the United States," which Britain naturally resisted.[31] By claiming control of an integrated Commonwealth force, rather than just its own national forces, Britain could preserve its clout among the western Allies and minimize the shift of power to the United States. The tension between national independence and allied integration did not reflect a conflict between Canadian political interests and military effectiveness, as it had in

---

[30] Allied orders of battle in Ellis, *Statistical Survey*, 126.

[31] Kevin Smith, *Conflict Over Convoys: Anglo-American Logistics Diplomacy in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

World War I. Instead, it represented a battle between Canadian political interests and British political interests.

There was a military need for allied integration only after the liberation of France caused the Allies to face the Germans on a continuous front in western Europe, as they had in World War I. The ability to freely shift troops along the front and to deploy them in any configuration again became critically important. International integration did, in fact, occur in response to this military imperative. However, because Canada had been successful in preserving the First Canadian Army up until that point, part of this integration occurred under Canadian command. The First Canadian Army became a multinational army, including British, American, Polish, and Dutch units, and "was the largest force ever led by a Canadian."[32] Maintaining an independent Canadian army therefore did not impede allied integration when such integration became militarily desirable.

Preserving an independent national force also served its political objectives by giving the Canadians a prominence out of proportion with their numbers. Within a month of the Normandy landings, there were two Canadian divisions in northwestern Europe (i.e. the 2nd and 3rd Infantry) out of a total of twenty-five Allied divisions. At the end of the war, there were five Canadian divisions (i.e. the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry and the 4th and 5th Armoured) out of eighty-eight Allied divisions.[33] Canada therefore fielded only between 8% and 6% of Allied divisions in northwestern Europe. Yet Canadians could rightly claim to have taken one of five D-Day invasion beaches (20%),[34] to have provided one of the eight Allied armies that served in northwestern Europe (13%),[35] and to have freed one of the four countries liberated by this campaign (25%).[36]

---

[32] Granatstein, "Canada: Armed Forces," 146.
[33] Allied order of battle diagrams and data in Ellis, *Statistical Survey*, 181-185.
[34] The Canadians landed at "Juno" beach, while the British landed at "Sword" and "Gold" and the Americans at "Utah" and "Omaha."
[35] In 1944-1945, the First Canadian Army fought alongside the First French Army, the Second British Army, and the First, Third, Seventh, Ninth, and Fifteenth American Armies.
[36] The Canadians liberated Holland. The other countries liberated during the campaign in northwestern Europe were France, Belgium, and Luxemburg.

On the morning after "Victory in Europe" Day, Britain's *Daily Mirror* trumpeted "the grand Canadians" before mentioning "the Australians and New Zealanders" or "the loyal Indians."[37] It did so despite the fact that Canada had mobilized fewer soldiers than Australia and New Zealand or India.[38] This example reinforces the notion that the concentration of Canadian troops in an independent national force allowed them to win recognition out of proportion with their numbers.

General Currie is given much credit for having found a compromise between allied integration and national independence during World War I by retaining British officers and blocking the formation of a "Canadian Army" while keeping the Canadian divisions together. The synthesis he achieved allowed the Canadian Corps to satisfy the requirements of both military effectiveness and domestic politics. In World War II, Canadian generals were much more aggressive and one-sided in promoting the national independence of Canadian forces. In a sense, this response seems to have been less innovative and sophisticated than Currie's.

However, there was no need for a synthesis between allied integration and national independence during the Second World War. While the tension between the two represented a conflict between military effectiveness and domestic politics in World War I, it did not reflect this same conflict in World War II. For most of the war, military effectiveness did not require more allied integration or less national independence. When more integration was needed, it could and did take place under the auspices of Canada's national army. The strategy of maintaining an independent Canadian force achieved its political object by allowing Canadian soldiers to play a disproportionate role in the war, gaining prominence in both foreign and domestic eyes. Since national independence did not impede military effectiveness and did serve

---

[37] Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[38] Canada mobilized 690 thousand army soldiers in World War II, while Australia and New Zealand mobilized more than 884 thousand, and India mobilized 2,500 thousand. Including air forces and navies, Canada mobilized 1,100 thousand, while Australia and New Zealand mobilized more than 1,186 thousand, and India mobilized 2,582 thousand. Australia and New Zealand figures are artificially low because data on New Zealand refers to the number mobilized at the end of the war rather than to the cumulative total mobilized during the war. Ellis, *Statistical Survey*, 227-228.

domestic political goals, Canadian officers were fundamentally correct, if somewhat unimaginative, in aggressively pushing for it.

The legacy of the Canadian Corps in World War I sheds some light on Canadian military leadership in World War II because, in both conflicts, Canadian officers faced the issues of professional organization versus militia organization, meritocracy versus patronage, and allied integration versus national independence. Currie and his subordinates have been held in high esteem because they reconciled an army built on the militia system with the need for a professional fighting force, ensured that meritocracy triumphed over patronage, and synthesized allied integration with national independence. Canadian military leaders in World War II have been found lacking by comparison to this high standard. But this is not a fair comparison. Whereas Currie faced a set of resolvable dilemmas, the same issues did not develop this way during the Second World War. First, while rivalry between the Permanent Force and the Militia damaged Canada's Army during the inter-war years, the question of professional versus militia organization was rendered moot by decisions taken by the Canadian government in September, 1939. There is no way that Canadian officers in World War II could have reconciled the professional army concept with the militia concept as their counterparts did in World War I. Second, whereas Currie had faced a clear choice between establishing a fair meritocracy and allowing blatant patronage, Canada's World War II leaders had to chart a more uncertain course between slipperier notions of merit and subtler forms of favouritism. Third, the vastly different strategic situation in World War II meant that there was no need for an innovative synthesis between allied integration and national independence. A simple insistence upon the latter satisfied the requirements of both military effectiveness and domestic politics.

Currie and his subordinates deserve credit for resolving the dilemmas they faced. However, Canadian military leaders in World War II cannot reasonably be judged against this legacy since they did not face a set of similarly soluble dilemmas. If success is defined as surmounting obstacles in the way of one's objectives, then Canadian officers could never have been as successful in World War II as they had been in World War I because the second war did

not provide as many surmountable obstacles as the first. This conclusion is not meant as a sweeping vindication of every Canadian general who served in World War II. It does not absolve them of mistakes made in leading particular operations. Specific criticisms of specific decisions can only by assessed case by case. However, this conclusion does imply that bemoaning the failure of Canadian generals in the second war to live up to the high standards of innovation and problem-solving set by Currie in the first is a spurious exercise. The legacy of the Canadian Corps in World War I is not an appropriate benchmark for assessing Canadian military leadership in World War II.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnett, Correlli. *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation.* London: Macmillan, 1986.

Bercuson, David. *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment.* Toronto: Stoddart, 2001.

Brennan, Patrick. "Byng's and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 2002): 5-16.

Clausewitz, Carl von, (ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret). *On War.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Ellis, John. *World War II: A Statistical Survey.* New York: Facts On File, 1995.

English, John. *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command.* New York: Praeger, 1991.

English, John. *Lament for an Army: The Decline of Canadian Military Professionalism.* Concord, Ontario: Irwin, 1998.

Granatstein, Jack. "Canada: Armed Forces." In I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot, eds. *The Oxford Companion to World War II.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Granatstein, Jack. *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War.* Toronto: Stoddart, 1993.

Greenhous, Brereton. "'Would it Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely . . . ?': A Canadian Christmas, 1943," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (April, 1989): 51-55.

Harris, Stephen. *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Hayes, Geoffrey. "Science and the Magic Eye: Innovations in the Selection of Canadian Army Officers, 1939-1945," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter 1995/96): 275-295.

Miller, Carman. *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902.* Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1993.

Morton, Desmond. *A Military History of Canada*, Fourth Edition. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999.

Reid, Brian. *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902.* St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell, 1996.

Smith, Kevin. *Conflict Over Convoys: Anglo-American Logistics Diplomacy in the Second World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.