



Robert Rogge. *Fearsome Battle: With the Canadian Army in World War II Europe.* Llano: Camroc Press, 2005. 149 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9754503-5-2.

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A Personal Story

There have been and continue to be many works written about the history of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. From regimental records to collections of letters, books on this period abound, covering its battles, politics, and legacy. Robert Rogge's book, however, is none of these. It is a personal story in the truest sense—one man's recollection of a relatively short period in his life that would stay with him for decades.

Fearsome Battle reads like a novel—the author does not use the first person or even his own name. Instead, his “character” is Ian—a young American “obsessed with an urge to be involved in stirring events half a world away” (p. 9), who joined a Canadian highland regiment and subsequently shipped off to England to wait. The waiting ended with D-Day, and Ian experiences the war in Europe from the beaches to well inland.

The book is made up of very short chapters—some are only a couple of pages long—but within each, Rogge is frank, often brutal, and very graphic in his recollection of both events and personal experiences. The chapter on D-Day is particularly honest, especially the vivid description of his seasickness: “The agony of the rolling sea conquered [the men] and they spewed and gagged, cursing Hitler, the war, the parents who created them. King and country became gross obscenities, mouthed by desperate men” (p. 17).

Descriptions such as this are prevalent in this short work. Rogge's dramatic text keeps the reader engaged and interested. Instead of the stereotypical, perhaps Hollywood, image of the stiff-spined soldier going over the

top into battle, Rogge humanizes war, admitting via Ian that he was “shaken and horrified” (p. 23), while knowing full well that he would have to go into battle again.

Rogge makes special note of a particularly poignant aspect of Canadian military history, Vimy Ridge. Many noted Canadian historians have argued that the great battle of the First World War gave birth to Canada as a nation. Rogge dedicates an entire chapter to the site (albeit a page and a half). His description of the war memorial is touching, noting that the “beautiful monoliths” that make up the enormous sculpture “held their breaths” and “the eye, in their simple, clean beauty” (pp. 86-87). He describes, too, the in-your-face reality of Canadian soldiers staring at so many names etched in stone from another war, while they fought their own, walking in “the Valley of their fathers” (p. 87).

This brief memoir is likely aimed at readers who already know some of the history of the Second World War. While Rogge does not go into detail about strategy or great battles, he does not explain certain terms either, making what could be an enjoyable read for a history novice into a bit of a research project. Slang such as “Jerry” and abbreviations such as “N.C.O.” would be more effective if explained, or described, and would likely add more to the story-telling aspect of this book, while not bogging down the reader in military jargon. There is a small glossary at the back of the book, however.

While the events depicted in this memoir were long ago, and the process of recollection can sometimes be tainted by time, Rogge's fictionalized self helps the

reader relate to his experiences, without seeming too far-fetched. Certain aspects are likely not verbatim, and the author admits that he had to distance himself from his own memories. He manages, however, to maintain the authenticity of a memoir.

In the Canadian War Museum there is a text panel entitled, "Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times." The story of "Ian" fits this description perfectly.

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