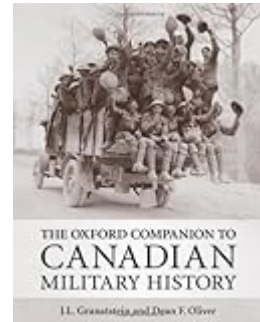


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

J. L. Granatstein, Dean F. Oliver. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History*. Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2011. xiii + 514 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-543088-2.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Having no prior experience with the Oxford Companion series of books, this reviewer was somewhat surprised by the encyclopedic nature of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History*. Survey texts are most useful when written along alphabetically or chronologically, and the alphabetical organization of this particular book makes it rather easy to follow. Sadly, because of the convoluted nature of Canadian military history, it may have been better organized along chronological lines, if only to sharpen the emphasis placed on the historical context of specific events and the importance of specific individuals within the events to which they were tied. The information within is very densely packed, not precisely in the sense that historical details are included in a manner that would obfuscate fact, but more particularly in a very literal and tactile sense: this is not a book one would take on a hiking trip.

The wry and sardonic writing style may prove to be an issue for the strict and traditionalist historian, who seeks strict fact over observation; this has long been a conflict within the academy. To one who is more liberal in their scholarly views, it makes the material more accessible and may in fact offer greater insight to the perceptions of Canadians as they pertain to specific issues discussed by Granatstein and Oliver. Their reliance

upon the extant work of great names in Canadian military history (Sean Muloney, Peter Haydon, and of course the eminent C. P. Stacey, to name a few) and their praise of certain individuals (such as Terry Copp, of Wilfrid Laurier University, or Generals Rick Hillier and Roméo Dallaire), reveals an academic clique students wish to both join and avoid: to join the clique is to be associated with fame within the field of Canadian military history; to avoid membership therein implies an ability to provide a less formulated take on Canadian military history and produce a more unique corpus of scholarly work. Granatstein and Oliver heavily emphasize the efforts of the Canadian Armed Forces's land power and virtually ignore its naval capacity, providing only a passing inspection to a branch of Canada's military with a long and glorious past. They fail to emphasize the intertwined nature of the Canadian Forces and Canada's domestic security establishment—the Coast Guard, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Border Control, et cetera, whether in combined efforts at home or in missions abroad. The one noticeable exception is their long critiques of the botched 1990s missions in Rwanda and Bosnia/Herzegovina.

The *Companion* is very well structured, its textual evidence balanced with illustrations, maps, and photographs. Its writing style is engaging, and often ironic.

As a result, the material Granatstein and Oliver present is very accessible to all levels of reader, from senior high school to postgraduate. Unfortunately for the latter group, the *Companion* is poorly referenced, structured rather as a high-school-level textbook might be. This decreases the value it has for the serious student of history. The other side of this coin is that it makes Granatstein and Oliver's text very useful for undergraduate survey courses and as a reference text for teaching assistants and professors who lack time to do serious research of their own when constructing a lecture or teaching plan. A text of this sort is very useful for the undergraduate student of Canadian military history, for it helps the student navigate the muddy waters of which Canadian military and political contexts and issues consist. In this sense, it is a shame a similar volume was not published sooner.

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