

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Brent Byron Watson. *Far Eastern Tour: The Canadian Infantry in Korea, 1950- 1953.* London and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. xiii + 238. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-2372-2.

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Published on H-War (February, 2004)

Forgotten Soldiers of the Forgotten War

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This is an informative and delightful book. Well researched and beautifully written it is a much-needed addition to the literature of the Korean War. Canada was quick to respond to the United Nations call for military forces to stop the North Korean aggression. But there is very little written about the nations involved. Watson's work is not only a social history of the Korean War years, but also an excellent account of the long-ignored role of the Canadian soldier during the war, and it is an easy read. There will be a few who will be unhappy with Brent Byron Watson's account, because he paints the picture as he sees it. And the picture of Canadian troops thrown into a war for which they were not prepared is not a pretty one. Beginning with the breakdown of the early recruitment system and following through to the disappointment of homecoming, Watson tells what it was like to be trained in a manner irrelevant to the war soldiers would be called upon to fight. He discusses the life of the soldier in combat and concludes his work with some comments about the almost nonexistent recognition these men received on their return home.

Relying on wide and careful research the author has

gone to the oral histories to consider this call to arms from the point of view of the men on the ground. And his analysis brings us a poignant look at the conditions under which the Canadian soldier fought, and in which a good number of these young men died. While there is no doubt that the author has considerable respect for the Canadian soldier, and believes that they were victims of shoddy equipment and improper training, he faces the facts in reporting, "Contrary to what the popular historians have claimed, the Canadians did not perform particularly well in Korea" (p. 77). This is a harsh judgment, though perhaps an honest one. But there were some occasions, "the defense of Hill 227 for example," where Canadians fought hard and well.

This book will appeal to a variety of persons from the serious scholar wanting to know the details of life for Canadians during the Korean War, to the casual reader who finds it interesting to take a unique look into a part of a nation's culture. I find the scholarship highly effective, his narrative style remarkable, and his insights humane and informative. I would recommend *Far Eastern Tour: The Canadian Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953* to anyone interested in military as well as social or cultural history.

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Citation: Paul M. Edwards. Review of Watson, Brent Byron, *Far Eastern Tour: The Canadian Infantry in Korea, 1950-*

1953. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2004.

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