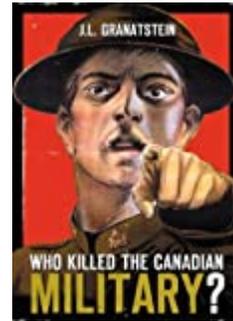




**J. L. Granatstein.** *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* Toronto: HarperCollins, 2004. vi + 250 pp. CAD 24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-00-200675-0.



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### **A Story of Decline: The Tory Interpretation of History**

Professor Granatstein is well known to most readers of H-Canada, and his many books are authoritative guides to Canadian military, diplomatic, and political history. Galen Perras has recently provided a useful summary of the career of this most eminent of commentators, in his review of Granatstein's *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (2002), posted on H-War.[1]

Gibbon remarked of his uneventful service in the Seven Years' War that the captain of the Hampshire militia had not been useless to the historian of Rome. Granatstein's military service has been not merely useful but motivating: the lieutenant of the Canadian Army has given the scholar a degree of sympathy with the military and its values often lacking among Canadian intellectuals, at any rate outside our small but distinguished fraternity of military historians.

The dilapidated state of Canada's military is now notorious, and Granatstein has recently devoted himself to lobbying for increased military spending. This book is clearly intended as one aspect of that campaign. The result is a polemic against the military and foreign policies of Canadian leaders over the past half century, from

Lester Pearson's famous intervention in the Suez affair forward. But there is nothing wrong with a knowledgeable and well-argued polemic: a history with a point is a big improvement on a history without a point. Granatstein's central contention is that the lamentable state of Canada's military is due in the last analysis to the hostility to the military of much of Quebec's Francophone population and to the unconcern of the Canadian people as a whole: "at root, the real killers of the Canadian military were you and I, the Canadian people" (p. 202). But the logic of his argument would also place blame on the political structures that have taught the Canadian public to abandon what were once fiercely-held pro-Western loyalties, and so to disregard military issues almost entirely.

Granatstein begins his account with Lester Pearson's ostensible invention of peacekeeping during the Suez crisis of 1956. Peacekeeping rapidly became a kind of self-assumed national *metier*. Simultaneously, it became an all-too-convenient excuse for failing to equip the Canadian military with modern but expensive equipment. "It wasn't Mike Pearson who helped kill the Canadian mil-

itary,” writes Granatstein, “rather, the idea of peace-keeping that his Nobel Prize made into Canada’s national mission is the culprit” (p. 34).

The Suez crisis has passed into the officially propounded “Heritage Minute” version of Canadian history as the moment at which Canada’s peaceful and pragmatic nature asserted itself against the atavistic, and ultimately un-Canadian, impulses of imperial loyalty. Granatstein provides a less nationalist but more accurate narrative of Ottawa’s policy during the Suez crisis, reminding us that the peacekeeping mission of 1956 was intended to be a temporary measure while a solution to the underlying disputes was negotiated. The peacekeepers, as Granatstein reminds us, were ejected by Nasser in 1967, leading to the war of that year. This is as far as Granatstein carries the story of the consequences of Suez, but it must be said that he takes the story of Pearson’s failed peacekeeping mission further than do most other Canadian writers.

The Suez fiasco resulted in the replacement of British power in the Middle East by that of anti-western Arab dictators, from Nasser to Saddam Hussein. The rise of the Iraqi Baath Party in particular was a direct consequence of the withdrawal of the British from the region: power abhors a vacuum. The Suez affair also marked the first time that the Arabs employed an oil embargo against the Western powers. Obviously, all these aspects of the affair leave Pearson’s canonical and hallowed achievement looking less than glorious, and most are left out of the account by Canadianists concerned to show that Pearson was a good Canadian, opposed to colonialism and fully in favor of peace.

Having reached and duly celebrated those arresting conclusions, our national narrative feels no need for further analysis: it has been concerned less with the effect of Canada on the world than with the effect of foreign policy upon our internal politics, including, of course, the interminable Quebec problem, and also upon our precious-held national identity as peacekeeper to mankind. The focus is both self-referential and essentialist, being fundamentally about who we are, or pretend to be, rather than about what influence we have on the external calculus of power. Granatstein deserves credit for asking some less self-satisfied and less inwardly focused questions.

Granatstein goes on to argue that each major government of the past half-century was a culprit in the decline of the Canadian military. John Diefenbaker’s prevarications about nuclear policy, and his uncooperative attitude during the Cuban missile crisis—during which the Royal

Canadian Navy put to sea of its own accord, despite Ottawa’s truculence toward the United States—showed how politically effective anti-Americanism could be. Paul Hellyer’s unification of the Armed Forces under the Pearson governments of the 1960s turned soldiers into bureaucrats in bus drivers’ uniforms, undermining morale even as it intentionally destroyed storied but imperially-tainted institutions. The effects of Pierre Trudeau’s “malign neglect” (p. 95) of the military were heightened by his integration of civil servants into the National Defence Headquarters command structure. Brian Mulroney came to power promising better funding, but aside from the purely cosmetic introduction of new uniforms, his priorities were elsewhere. Jean Chr tien, finally, “finished off the Canadian Forces” (p. 163), deploying the military on numerous politically opportune UN peacekeeping missions and shamelessly using Canadian soldiers as stage props for foreign photograph opportunities, though he regarded the Forces themselves with an unusual (and unusually personal) degree of hostility, even for a Quebecer, and repeatedly cut the military budget.

Granatstein would like Canada to be a loyal member of the Western alliance. He is at bottom a Louis St. Laurent Liberal. St. Laurent “went to the people to explain the realities of the world, and to educate” (p. 238). But St. Laurent’s case for the Western alliance was the product of a moment in history that has passed: the Canada addressed by St. Laurent was a Western settler state, still loyal to its founding British identity, which had recently played a part in two victorious Anglo-American war efforts. Even many Quebecers shared with Canadians a common hostility to the adversary of the day, Soviet Communism. Fifty years later, with much Quebec opinion as neutralist and anti-military as ever—notwithstanding, as Granatstein points out, the successful integration of Francophones into all ranks of the Armed Forces—and with bi-culturalism having degenerated into a version of multi-culturalism that officially pretends that we have no more in common with the Anglo-American powers than with Uzbekistan or Rwanda, those venerable loyalties to which St. Laurent was able successfully to appeal are in decided eclipse.

Granatstein proposes that we fully fund and equip our three-brigade army, our three-fighter-squadron air force, and our twenty-ship navy, which is to say he proposes that we should increase our forces to the paper strength that Ottawa now pretends to have, with a further 5,000 reservists and some additional (but expensive) airlift capacity thrown in. Such ideas hardly amount to a counter-revolution, but even these modest proposals are

extremely unlikely to be implemented within Canada's present political structure.

Granatstein's argument shows that the basic structures of Canadian politics, including the overweening influence both of Quebec and of an ideologically anti-American Anglophone left, have, over the decades, driven governments of both parties to seek "cheap popularity by being a chore boy for the United Nations and refusing to cooperate fully with our friends" (p. 202). To question those political structures, to ask if we might do better were we independent of the persistently neutralist Quebec, or to argue in favor of an assertively Anglo-American identity, never mind in favor of annexation, would of course be to step outside the narrow intellectual confines of Canadian political life. Perhaps Granatstein has decided to work for small gains within a hostile system, rather than to question the very system that, as his volume so effectively demonstrates, makes sound foreign and defence policy close to impossible.

In implying so strongly that the historical dynamics of Canadian politics militate against sound policy, Granatstein traduces one of the key conventions of Canadian nationalist historiography. The history of Canadian foreign policy has traditionally been imagined as a narrative of national advance from *Colony to Nation*, as the title of A. R. M. Lower's old but still-valuable classic has it. Granatstein has himself in the past written of a national advance from *Empire to Umpire*, in the titular phrase of a volume co-written with Norman Hillmer ten years ago.[2] More recently, his *Who Killed Canadian History* strongly defended this kind of national story.[3] This kind of history tells a story of progress from an older, less-satisfactory condition to a more modern and more progressive state of national independence. It is history with a happy and even edifying ending: this is our national, and nationalist, version of what Sir Herbert Butterfield called the Whig interpretation of history.

*Who Killed the Canadian Military* tells a story with the same subject, and centered around the same events, as Granatstein's earlier *Empire to Umpire*, but it is a very different story. The narrative mode is radically inverted: where there was once a happy ending, we now have betrayal and abandonment. Where once we had a satisfactory conclusion, we now have a scandalous one. Where there was optimism there is now only derogation. The ideal of the nation is no longer located in the present or the future, but in the past. It is a story not of advance but of decline: it is Tory rather than Whig history, a history of old loyalties sold out by opportunists unworthy of their great and storied heritage. *Who Killed the Canadian*

*Military* is on this level a fascinating historiographical experiment, a tale twice told, retold by the same author using many of the same materials, but giving up its true meaning only the second time through.

Granatstein brings us face to face with that meaning, with the elephant whose odor permeates the national living room, even if he does not name the beast quite directly: Canada did much positive good in world affairs as long as it had an external focus of loyalty. In the period since the world wars, we have entirely forsaken the old imperial loyalty that motivated the great achievements of the past, and have failed to replace it with any more tenable loyalty to the West, to the Anglo-American world, to the English-speaking peoples, or to any cause more inspiring than the institutional interests of the state based at Ottawa. In the era of this down-sized, inward-looking loyalty, we have not been much of a force for good—or indeed much of a force at all—on the world stage, all our conspicuous nationalism notwithstanding. Ottawa's Whigs need to play up Canada's role at the United Nations in order to obscure that central fact. Here we have the voice of a historiographical Tory, eloquent in his anger, recalling us to the values of yore.

This volume, as I have tried to indicate, is an accessible and thought-provoking read on a number of levels. I would recommend it for under-graduate use: it provides a concise and fluid guide to the Ottawa state's decision making process, as accurate and informed as it is well-illustrated by telling anecdotes and enlivened by a passionately argued point of view. It also presents a compelling alternative to the narcissistic "Heritage Moment" variety of national self-conceit, and to the allied tendency to tell the national story in a manner that is complacently Whiggish in its portrayal of the development of a multicultural, peace-loving, Nobel Prize-burnishing nation. A bit of historical Toryism—historical loyalism, one might say—is long overdue. Given the chance, students will eat it up.

#### Notes

[1]. Galen Perras, "The Canadian Army and Military Professionalism," published by H-War (August 2004): <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=114831094733875>.

[2]. J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998).

[3]. J. L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994).

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<https://networks.h-net.org/h-canada>

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