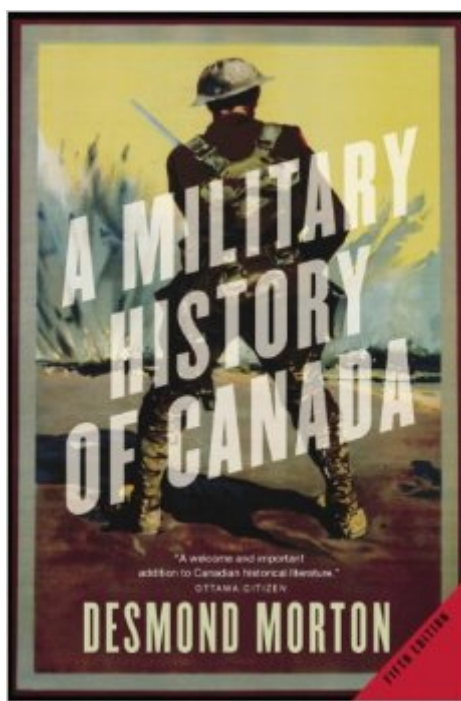


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A Military History Of Canada



Synopsis

Updated to 2007, including Canada's war on terrorism. Is Canada really a peaceable kingdom with an unmilitary people? Nonsense, says Desmond Morton. This is a country that has been shaped, divided, and transformed by war — there is no greater influence in Canadian history, recent or remote. From the shrewd tactics of Canada's First Nations to our troubled involvement in Somalia, from the Plains of Abraham to the deserts of Afghanistan, Morton examines our centuries-old relationship to war and its consequences. This updated edition also includes a new chapter on Canada's place in the war on terrorism. A Military History of Canada is an engaging and informative chronicle of Canada at war, from one of the country's finest historians.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book, at only 350 pages, attempts to cover 4 centuries of Canadian military history; thus, detail is heavily sacrificed. This is not necessarily a problem, if you're looking for an overview or introduction to the highlights of the topic. This book is very good at supplying this overview. Having said that, the average armchair historian may find the lack of detail frustrating, especially in areas where lots has already been written, e.g., the War of 1812 and both World Wars. This is balanced by an overarching view of the whole of Canadian history, linking themes and observing the evolution over the course of several hundred years. For me, the interwar years were the most interesting because I've normally focussed on detailed histories of certain events in my past readings. The post-WWII chapters are especially interesting and informative, and contain the most insightful analyses in the book. There are several pages of good pictures. It's always nice to put a face to the people involved. However, the maps are generally not detailed enough to be useful, mostly

overviews of the general lines of advance of the army, for instance. So why only three stars? The title of the book may be misleading - perhaps it should be "A History of the Military of Canada" instead. Much more coverage is given to military organisation, conscription debates, etc. than are given to actual operations. I feel there should have been a better balance between these two broad areas. Even as an overview book, it could have stood to be 50-100 pages longer to flesh out the operational side. This aspect dropped my ranking for the book. In summary, this is a very good book if you are looking for an overview of the subject. It lacks detail, as expected for its length, but this is compensated for by drawing together themes from widely separated events. The major drawback is its emphasis on the organisational side to the expense of the operational.

Shows how the development of Canada's military structure developed. Includes French, English conflict and development and brings the country's military history up to date in the 20th - 21st. century. A good read for anyone interested in the subject.

In his introduction Morton points out a comment from a military historian who described Canadians as being an "unmilitary people," a comment most Canadians would take as a compliment. Yet Morton believes this view of Canada and her people are not only simplistic, but incorrect, as he believes Canada actually has a rich military tradition that has helped shape the country in innumerable ways. From Morton's perspective Canada was an extension of the European competition for resources in the New World resulting in a series of skirmishes which shaped the country Canada would become. The tensions between the English, the French and their allies among the First Peoples for scarce resources spurred wars not just in the New World, but in the Old World; a tension that would not be resolved until one world power had triumphed over the other. Throughout much of the colonial era Canada was on the periphery, yet as Canada came into her own it would become of greater importance to Europe and the world beyond. Morton's prose is unique as he interjects a great deal of opinion and his writing fairly crackles with life; rather atypical for historical writing. An early chapter, "The Ancien Regime," is a great example. The chapter opens in a typically Morton fashion with Samuel de Champlain killing an Iroquois chief with few of the gory details spared. Morton accurately sums up how both the French and English colonies had little allure for professional soldiers compared to postings on the continent and elsewhere, and as a result troops that went to the New World were typically of a poorer quality. And while these early colonial wars failed to change the status quo, the ones that followed would alter the balance of power drastically. Morton deftly avoids bias towards one side or the other, yet his prose is hardly the

dry history which readers are likely accustomed to; instead Morton holds forth with his opinion unsparingly. Recounting how one war typically sewed the seeds for the next, Morton recounts how embittered the New England colonists felt at the end of King George's War when the fort at Louisburg was returned to the French in exchange for a port in India, as though their sacrifice meant nothing. Most knew they would be fighting for it again soon, and indeed they would. With England's final conclusive victory over France in the French and Indian War it was time to liquidate the French from Canada once and for all. Morton touches on every major and minor war following the British conquest of French Canada, and he walks readers through the development and evolution of Canadian national identity and how Canada came into its own as part of the British Empire, identifying how various events served to refine Canada's system of defense. The need to replace English units with a domestic integrated military structure helped spur the British North American Act of 1867. The wisdom of beefing up domestic military capability would prove vital in the Northwest Campaign of 1885; a victory that saved the country. The Canadian military would prove to be a useful tool for the defense of Empire in the Boer War (1899-1902), but while England did not press the issue with Canada, Canada's government felt an obligation to assist although public opinion was divided. These divisions and growing pacifism would resurface in later wars as well, revealing a deeper ambivalence in the Canadian character about being drawn into foreign wars on behalf of the Empire. Part of the dissent came from Canadians who viewed the Empire's motives as being suspect. World War I brought these tensions to the fore again, yet as Morton points out, the war served to help solidify national identity for Australia, Canada, and New Zealand through the crucible of war. The Canadians test would come at Vimy Ridge early in 1917, where all four Canadian divisions massed for a single attack on a fortified German defense. For Canadians the Battle of Vimy Ridge is as central to the formation of their national identity as Gallipoli is for the ANZACs and yet Morton devotes scarcely one page to it. The end of the First World War led to yet another period of demobilization only to have history repeat itself as tensions began to rise again in Europe. As the Phony War gave way to the Second World War (1939-1945), England quickly found itself in desperate need of assistance from her colonies, both at home and in her overseas possessions. With France quickly knocked out of the war, Canada became England's most powerful ally until America's entry in the war in late 1941. Unlike what occurred at the end of previous conflicts, Canada had little opportunity to demilitarize following the end of the Second World War as tensions between the western allies and the Soviets began to escalate almost immediately. The close cooperation between the United States, England, and Canada during the war, as well as close social and economic ties, resulted in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

in 1949. While Canada's previous tendency had been a predictable disarmament following wars, this time Canada remained mobilized to assist in a common defense against the Soviet threat. As Morton posits, Canada would come to serve as both peacekeeper and peacemaker in the post Cold War world, a role that continues to this day in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Canada's role around the world as a peacekeeper is no less controversial than it was at the time of the Boer War with many Canadians opposed to overseas involvement not just decrying the cost but the loss of life. Ultimately the question becomes whether Morton proves his point or not. My own impression was that Canada's history is much more unique and distinctive than expected, yet her history is almost inextricably intertwined with that of the British Empire. Were Canada not a part of British Empire it is unclear whether she would have fought with Britain in both World Wars, but that question is almost in the realm of counterfactual history. Canada is British to the core and yet also Canadian to the core. Morton speaks of Lord Durham's hopes of drowning Canadians in the progressive English spirit, yet I can't help but wonder if it isn't the other way around. Could it be that the spirit of the Canadians has pacified the Anglophile Canadians into seeing things their way? Comparing the actions America and England have been involved in during the 20th and 21st Century a pattern emerges; America is more frequently involved in conflicts than either England or Canada. When Canada has chosen to intervene militarily it is more often as a peacekeeper than as a combatant. Canada managed to avoid combat roles in the Suez Crisis, Vietnam, the Falklands, Grenada, Panama, and both Gulf Wars. As one of the world's largest economies Canada certainly could throw its' economic, political, and military might around if it wanted to and yet it doesn't. My own sense is that Canadians took the sacrifice of both World Wars to heart. They will fight when they have to and will do so to win, but they are not a militaristic people keen for a fight.

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