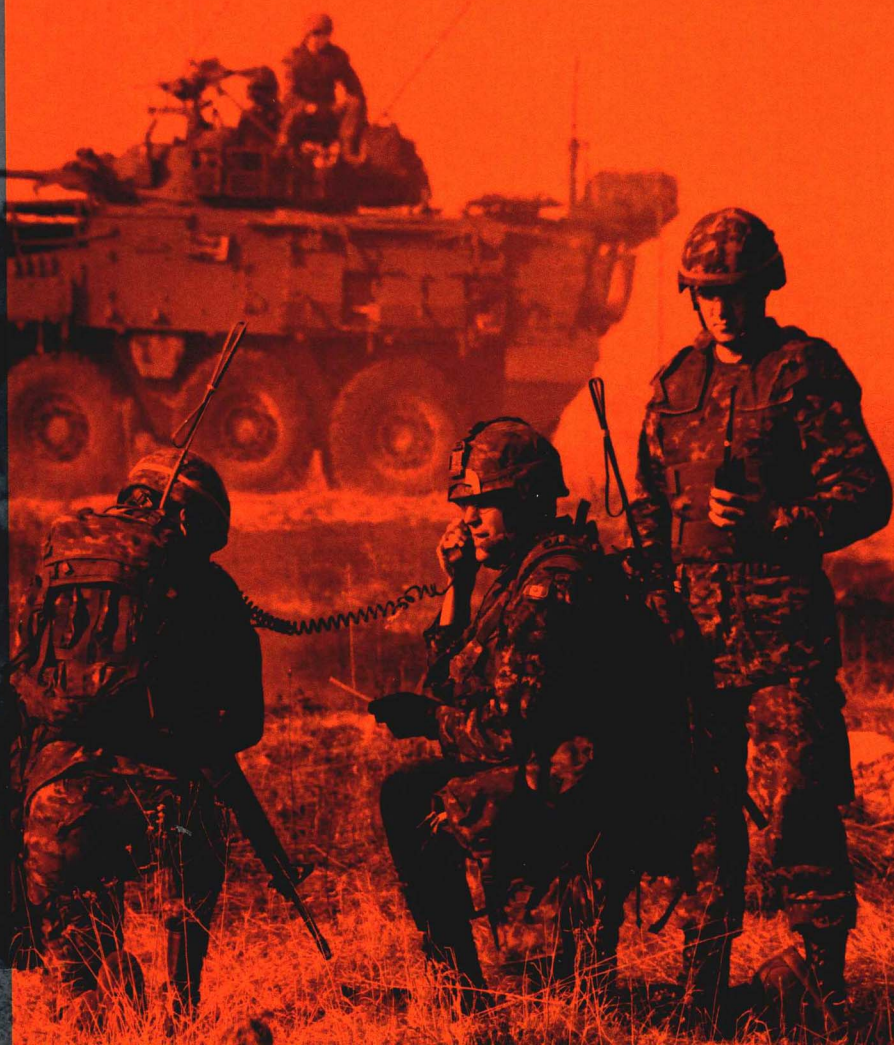


J. L. Granatstein

CANADA'S ARMY

Waging War and Keeping the Peace,
Second Edition



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Second Edition

J.L. GRANATSTEIN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

Toronto Buffalo London

© J.L. Granatstein 2011
Toronto Buffalo London
www.utppublishing.com
Printed in the U.S.A.

First edition published 2002; paperback edition (with new introduction) published 2004
Second edition published 2011
Reprinted 2016

Reprinted in Canada 150 Collection 2017

ISBN 978-1-4875-1666-6

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Granatstein, J.L., 1939–

Canada's army : waging war and keeping the peace / J.L. Granatstein. – 2nd ed.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4875-1666-6

1. Canada. Canadian Armed Forces – History. 2. Canada – History, Military. I. Title.

UA600.G7 2011 355.00971 C2010-907472-6

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund for its publishing activities.

PREFACE

I am the product of demographic good luck. I was born in 1939 at the tail end of the Great Depression and the beginning of the Second World War. I grew up in a Canada that was prosperous as never before, and, through good fortune rather than good management on my part, university education in the late 1950s, good jobs in the 1960s, and a reasonably priced house at the end of that decade were my lot.

Because of when I was born, again through the sheer accident of timing, I was too young for the Second World War and for Korea. When I joined the army in 1956, I encountered what now seems part of a half-century of peace, though it was the heart of the Cold War. My ten years of military service were wholly uneventful: a good university education at Le Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean and the Royal Military College in Kingston, desultory training at Camp Borden, and uneventful service in Ottawa, until I left the armed forces in 1966 to go into university teaching. I never heard a shot fired in anger and, except for the one occasion when I accompanied my platoon sergeant to blow up an unexploded hand grenade, I was never near danger.

Virtually everything I know about the army therefore comes from academic study, not hard experience. I am ultimately a dabbler and a dilettante, a scarred campaigner of the university wars, but not the real kind. Yet I do not doubt that my time at RMC was the definitive factor in shaping me. I was a feckless seventeen-year-old when I went to military college and a driven and organized Type A personality when I left. Ever since, I have made my career

out of the organizational skills I learned while trying to balance RMC's demanding academic schedule with military duties.

RMC shaped me in other ways too. The central staircase in the college's main building is a shrine to those hundreds of ex-cadets killed on active service, and the recently restored Memorial Arch at what used to be the college entrance commemorates them as well in resonating wording: 'Blow out ye bugles over these rich dead ...' RMC's auditorium, Currie Hall, honours every unit of the Canadian Corps of the Great War along with its great commander, General Sir Arthur Currie, and there are monuments, plaques, and the artifacts of wars past and present everywhere.

Those who attended the college came away imbued with a sense of service. Not to have that attitude required almost a conscious effort of will, and my will certainly was not strong enough to resist. But this commitment did not mean that every graduating cadet stayed in the armed forces; most throughout RMC's 125 years of history did not. Nor did it mean that every graduate believed in the military. For long periods I had doubts about the rightness of Canadian Forces' policies and about our alliances, and I sometimes still do.

Yet I am certain that everyone who went to RMC Kingston left with the sense that ordinary Canadians had done extraordinary deeds in the past and would do so again in the future, the classic definition of nationhood laid down decades ago by historian Frank Underhill. The evidence was all about the college that this confidence was justified – from Currie Hall to the bust of Harry Crerar, the commander of First Canadian Army in the Second World War, to the weaponry of the Cold War and peacekeeping on the grounds. The army had been the nation in arms in the two world wars, and the graduates of the college had helped lead the efforts that did so much to make Canada a nation and preserve the freedom of the world. In the Cold War and the peace that followed it had been the same, and it still is in a new millennium that is as dangerous as any other time in the last century.

This history of Canadians and their army is written in this spirit, but with an admixture of what is, I trust, constructive criticism. It is gratefully dedicated to all those Canadians who served their country in war and peace, and especially to those who did not survive their service to return to what is, thanks to their sacrifice, this best of all nations.

I should explain what this book is about and what it is not. It is a history of the Canadian Army, of organized bodies of Canadians fighting, training, and serving their nation in peace and in war. It is not a history of every war fought on Canadian soil, nor is it the story of Canadians who served as individuals in other armies. This organization explains why the text moves quickly through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries: very simply, the Canadian Army scarcely existed before the dawn of the twentieth century. It also explains why I have omitted the Nile Voyageurs of the 1880s and the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion that fought on the Loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War. I must also add that I have not followed today's practice of converting all measurements into metric: when soldiers fought for yards of ground and their vehicles ran on gallons of gas, the imperial system is employed.

Canada's Army is an extended argument for military professionalism. The military profession, much like any other, is based on expertise, a sense of corporate identity, and responsibility. The soldier has specialized skills learned and mastered through study and practice; he belongs to a self-regulating and exclusive organization distinct from civil society; and, in Canada, the soldier accepts that his profession makes him responsible to the civil authority, a servant of the government. Because the soldier controls deadly force, the sense of responsibility to the state, one firmly based on an ethical foundation, is crucial. But a professional soldier, unlike a doctor or an engineer, has one trait that marks him as different and special. As General Sir John Hackett put it, there is an unwritten clause of unlimited liability in his contract. 'It requires of a man that he be prepared to surrender life itself if the discharge of his duty should demand that. This is not often evoked in peacetime,' Hackett continued, 'but its existence lends a dignity to the military condition which is difficult to deny.' Civilian soldiers in huge numbers did their wartime duty for Canada, and more than a hundred thousand died in the process. But the professional has the obligation to give his life in peacetime too if so required. Many have.

Although I do not believe that history repeats itself, preparing this manuscript persuaded me that Canadians have replicated their military mistakes far too often. In peace we almost always underfunded the professional military and relied on the militia, the ordinary citizenry in arms. When war came, the people expected that great victories would be won at once, demanded that all

officers be strategists of Napoleonic calibre, and insisted that every soldier had a field marshal's baton hidden somewhere in his knapsack. The result of this utter naivety has been needless casualties while the army learned its trade in battle. And then, as soon as victory was won and peace came, the government disbanded the army, and the nation resumed its faith in the militia myth that every Canadian was, by definition, a natural soldier. In Canada no professionals were needed, except, perhaps, for the training of the militiamen.

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, ten years after al Qaeda's attack on the United States, and a decade after Canada first sent troops to Afghanistan, Canada's Army is in a better condition than it has been in decades. The Army's junior leadership and many of its senior commanders have proven themselves in battle, and this will shape the Army of the future. Since 2005, both Liberal and Conservative governments have provided new funding and invested in new equipment and in some (but still too few) additional men and women for the Army's battalions and regiments. Just as important, for the first time since the Second World War, the Army stands high in the public mind, and the war in Afghanistan, while unpopular with much of the public, has greatly increased the esteem in which the nation's soldiers are now held in every province. This is a change of historic proportions, and it suggests that the Canadian people may be willing to see those in uniform well provided for in the coming years. They should be because the costs of the nation's professional armed forces are the insurance premiums on which Canada's security ultimately depends. The equation is and always has been very simple: we pay now in dollars for a competent military or we pay later in dollars *and* with our sons and daughters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As always, in writing this book I have benefited from the advice and admonitions of friends and colleagues, some of which I have actually accepted. I have been struck by the fact that my close friends and former students occupy the high ground in Canadian military history, and their expertise has been of great value to me. My friends and former students Jock Vance and Patrick Brennan offered sage counsel. My closest colleagues at the Canadian War Museum, Roger Sarty and Dean Oliver, read chapters for me, as did Pat Brennan, David Bercuson, Des Morton, LCol's Ike Kennedy and J.P. McManus, Bill McAndrew, and Norman Hillmer. Roger Sarty, Bill Young, Jerry Tulchinsky, and Major Doug Delaney shared documents with me. With great generosity, Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, distinguished military historians both, let me use interviews they had conducted, and they, Major Delaney, and Patrick Brennan, whose work on the Canadian Expeditionary Force will change many preconceptions, let me read some of their yet unpublished work. So too did Lieutenant-Colonel Jack English, my RMC and Duke classmate who continues to challenge Canadian military historians with his interpretations. The Chief of the Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Mike Jeffrey, gave me copies of some of his papers and speeches and talked with me about the present condition and future of the army. Lieutenant-General Henri Tellier graciously allowed me to use some of his material on the Royal 22e Régiment. The Department of National Defence gave me permission to use the superb maps produced by the Directorate of History and Heritage at National Defence Headquarters, and I am most grateful to Dr Serge Bernier for his help in this matter. My cousin Carol Geller Sures let me use the Major Harry Jolley letters, a fine, sensitive collection from

the Second World War, and then graciously donated them to the Canadian War Museum. Jack Saywell allowed me to use his father's Great War letters and memoir, and also presented these materials to the museum.

While I was at the War Museum from July 1998 to June 2000 I had the opportunity and privilege of meeting and coming to know many veterans of the Second World War, Korea, and peacekeeping, as well as many serving members of the Canadian Forces. These encounters have greatly enriched this book. So too did my dealings with the museum's staff and Friends, a very knowledgeable group indeed. In addition to Roger Sarty and Dean Oliver, I must single out Serge Durflinger, Laura Brandon, Harry Martin, Dianne Turpin, Rachel Poirier, Jim Whitham, Leslie Redman, Colonel Jerry Holtzhauer, and General Paul Manson for their patience and perseverance in teaching me so much about military history, military artifacts, and war art. Leslie Redman greatly facilitated the photo research in the War Museum's all but untouched collections, research ably done for me by Gabrielle Nishiguchi. My friend LCdr Jacques Fauteux helped me get photographs of current Canadian Forces operations.

Linda McKnight, my longtime literary agent, continued her work on my behalf with great effect. Len Husband was a pleasure to work with at the University of Toronto Press. Rosemary Shipton edited this book, not the first of mine she has tackled, and any stylistic grace and coherence it may have must be credited to her. Any errors that remain are, of course, entirely my fault.

Over the years I have learned much from my good friends Desmond Morton (forty-six years now in his case), Norman Hillmer, Robert Bothwell, William Kaplan, Michael Bliss, Jack Saywell, Jerry Tulchinsky, Peter Neary, and David Bercuson, and I am unfailingly grateful to them all. My immense scholarly debt to Des and David will be apparent from the references to their many works in the notes. Even where I knew these colleagues to be wrong, I have doubted my own judgment, so highly do I esteem theirs! My academic and personal debts to Jack Saywell, in particular, extend over more than four decades and are very great indeed.

My dear wife, Elaine, has borne this book through its gestation as readily as the others. Carole and Eric and, especially, Tess keep me optimistic for the future. As always, Michael makes me wish that the past could have been different.

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CANADA'S ARMY
Waging War and Keeping the Peace

THE MILITIA MYTH: CANADIAN ARMS TO CONFEDERATION

'I had foreseen almost everything accurately,' wrote George T. Denison of the Fenian raid in the spring of 1866, 'but on one point I had absolutely failed. The idea never entered my head that the authorities would send infantry without any cavalry whatever ... I do not blame myself for not foreseeing this, for I was still a young man, only twenty-six, and I had not then that confidence in the average stupidity of officials which, through long experience, I have since acquired.'¹ The militia officer, the man of the people, always knew best.



The central myth in the history of Canadian arms is, and always has been, that the colonists and citizens provide their own defence. Professional soldiers are not necessary so long as the people, organized into a militia, received the minimal training required to protect the country. In New France, after all, the *habitants*, from teenagers to greybeards, had rallied to their elected captains to fend off marauding Indians and incursions from the hated Americans or English. In Upper Canada the sturdy yeomanry, their flintlocks at the ready, had formed a military force-in-being, quick to serve their leaders in war against the republic to the south or enemies of the crown. And the South African War, the Great War, the Second World War, and Korea were all fought and won by militiamen. There are elements of truth in this myth, to be sure,

but Canada has survived in war more because of good luck than the military skills and ferocity of her militias. The myth, however, has power, though it never served the best interests of Canada or its army.

The militia myth took shape in Upper Canada during and after the War of 1812, and it continued to harden into gospel truth before and after Confederation. According to its tenets, as laid down by the main creator of the myth, the Anglican cleric John Strachan, Upper Canada had been saved from the Americans by the exertions of the local citizenry. Yes, the British regulars had been involved, but it was the Upper Canadians who had truly carried the load. Egerton Ryerson, writing in 1880, expressed this fairy tale in its grandest terms: 'The Spartan bands of Canadian Loyalist volunteers, aided by a few hundred English soldiers and civilized Indians, repelled the Persian thousands of democratic American invaders, and maintained the virgin soil of Canada unpolluted by the foot of the plundering invader.'²

Ryerson and Strachan between them turned myth into history. As early as November 1812, when the first American attacks had just been repulsed, Strachan noted proudly that 'the Province of Upper Canada, without the assistance of men or arms, except a handful of regular troops, repelled its invaders, slew or took them all prisoners, and captured from its enemies the greater part of the arms by which it was defended.' Never, Strachan said later, 'never, surely, was greater activity shown in any country than our militia has exhibited; never greater valour, cooler resolution, and more approved conduct; they have emulated choicest veterans, and they have twice saved their country.'³ There was little truth in this account, but that was beside the point. Truth never does matter in the creation of myth.

Strachan continued his efforts as the war went on, its fortunes fluctuating. To him, British commanders were often weak and vacillating, too willing to retreat, too ready to give up territory. He lived in the town of York, twice taken by the invaders,⁴ and he intemperately denounced Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, the British Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief in British North America, for having 'abandoned the Loyalists to be bound hand and foot to their fate.' Prevost's tactics were governed by 'imbecility,' said Strachan, and his successor in 1814 in Upper Canada was worse, a commander 'destitute of that military fire and vigour of decision, which the principal commander in this country must possess in order to preserve it.' In an open letter,

the cleric and his supporters offered their prescription: 'A new commander and more troops.'

Strachan, an armchair general, was partially correct in the severity of his judgment: the incompetence of some British commanders was matched, if not exceeded, by that of the Americans. But he overstated matters dramatically when he claimed that only the 'astonishing exertions of the militia' had saved the situation in 1814.⁵ The British had repeatedly bumbled, he argued, but the local companies had done the job – and kept Canada British. The love/hate relationship with an empire that could hardly manage its affairs, but to which Canada must belong if it was not to be Americanized, was all too evident. The fear that London would sell out British North America if that were in its interests was also palpable. Most important for the creation of myth, if the country boasted a militia of proven bravery, there was no need for a standing army with high-caste officers, tremendous expenses, and potential danger towards the state.

Powerful as the militia myth was for the locals, sensible leaders in both New France and Upper and Lower Canada recognized that these citizen armies were fundamentally untrained, ill-disciplined, and equipped with a variety of incompatible weapons. The shrewder among them understood that militiamen sustained the local economy and produced much of the food that both the professional soldiers and the militias needed to march or fight. Removing these men from their farms for any length of time could be disastrous. At the same time, the leaders knew that militiamen would fight hardest to protect their own homes and families, but much less willingly for broader geopolitical interests that might take them anywhere up to 50 or 500 miles away from their hearth. The eighteenth-century world wars between France and England concerned the *habitant* only to the extent that they directly affected him. The War of 1812, whatever Strachan might say, similarly affected primarily the Loyalist farmers in southwestern Upper Canada and the 'late Loyalists' who came from the United States after the revolution, as American armies headed east from Detroit through Upper Canada. Would these men fight? Would they opt out and hope for the best? Or would they join the American 'liberators'?

The idea that Canada's defence had been provided primarily by the local militias was taken as a given by both *Canadiens* and Canadians, who did not

always, in times of peace, look with a kindly gaze on the regular troops who were garrisoned on their lands, chased their daughters, and caused fights in their taverns. In war, however, those same locals demanded that more men, more weapons, more everything, be provided for their defence. The colonial masters overseas had their own reasons for holding Canada, but those interests were not always the same as the settlers'. The imperial governments wanted the riches of North America, the furs, timbers, and fish, for London or for Paris, and they wanted to deny those riches to the other. The colonists, in contrast, wanted a good life for themselves and their children, their share of the bounty of the land, and peace. The interests on both sides might converge, but they were not always the same.

To protect their North American holdings, the governments across the North Atlantic sent regiments to Canada, usually infantry, artillery, and, very occasionally, cavalry. The numbers involved were always small, and the battles of the colonial era tended to be confused struggles between a few thousand troops caught up in a vast wilderness. Against the aboriginal peoples, the French with their firearms initially had huge advantages in the conflicts after contact. The first firing of Samuel de Champlain's quadruple-shotted arquebus in 1609 killed two Iroquois and mortally wounded a third, stunning the rest of the large war party into defeat and flight.⁶ But against other regular forces, drawn up in European formation or sheltering behind European-style wooden battlements, the advantage went to the commander able to seize the key ground and keep the troops disciplined and motivated.

Those troops soon included native allies. Through strategic calculation, as well as gifts, bribery, and political and commercial promises almost always destined not to be kept, the various native tribes forged their alliances with the French or the English. The chiefs negotiated with the white leaders, trying to preserve as much of their lands as they could against the encroachments of settlement. They hoped to play one side off against the other, but, inevitably, they were caught up in the struggle between the imperial forces. As a result, natives served as scouts, as skirmishers, and as vital adjuncts in battle. The difficulty was that the Indians were not always reliable allies for either empire: they persisted in acting as though they had their own ways of warfare and their own tribal and commercial interests, as they did. But when they fought, they