

# 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.