

WHO KILLED THE CANADIAN MILITARY?

by J. L. Granatstein

Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. 250 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Commander Mark Tunnicliffe

Rarely does a book state its thesis and provide an answer to the key question it poses on the front of its dust jacket. But, that is precisely what Jack Granatstein's new book has managed to do. In this unabashed polemic, the author sets himself the task of fixing responsibility for the demise of the Canadian Forces, while also proposing the key elements needed for its successful revival. This book follows the format of his earlier *Who Killed Canadian History*, and it appears just in time to influence the outcome of the upcoming defence and foreign policy reviews. It is clearly intended for the general reader, in the hope that members of the public will join the debate — and perhaps engage in some soul searching. The obvious question for the reviewer is: "Does the author succeed?"

The author's argument starts in the end zone with a quick poke check that grabs the reader's attention with the first sentence — it was all Lester Pearson's fault. The 'classic' peacekeeping construct that grew out of his successful intervention in the 1956 Suez crisis — and which became lodged in the Canadian public's mind as a model role for the military — is categorized by Granatstein as a "dangerous distraction". In the Cold War era, the interposition of a peacekeeping force only worked when both sides in a conflict wanted a face-saving excuse to stop fighting, and that itself was often affected by the restraining hands of one or the other of the opposing superpowers. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, 'peacekeeping' became increasingly violent and the United Nations (UN) largely irrelevant. Nevertheless, both the public and the government continue to be fixated on that outdated view of what 'peacekeeping' is. In the end, the author excuses Pearson, who understood the limits of what he had created: it was his Nobel Peace Prize that put the stars in the eyes of the public and the politicians that followed.

Briskly moving the argument out of his own zone, Granatstein switches the blame to John Diefenbaker and his wanton degradation of Canada-US relations.

The book traces the shift of Canada's tight military links (dependency?) from Britain to the US, through Diefenbaker's failure to understand how the military can serve as a useful tool of statecraft (perhaps confounded by the many controversial, and not always incorrect, procurement decisions he had to make), through to "the folly of anti-Americanism". One element of this era which might have been better explored was the very close links which the services had developed with their US counterparts — links that perhaps inclined them to be less than amenable to the bidding of the government, as happened with both the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Navy during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This issue of the military as a tool of government policy, and the necessity for politicians to understand how to use, control, and care for it, was not understood by Diefenbaker, and might be missed by the reader as well.

This point was certainly not missed by the "complex, maddening, revolutionary figure" that was Paul Hellyer. In a conflict of emotions on both sides, Hellyer broke the military to his will through a struggle culminating in the sacking of Rear Admiral Landymore for "disloyalty". The discussion of Hellyer's subjugation of the Canadian military to "Trial by Error" provides Granatstein the opportunity to explore the impact of unification on political control of the new Canadian Forces, largely by means of the 'civilianization' of the decision-making processes. Once again, he suggests an issue but perhaps fans on his shot. One is left wondering about the impact of the integration battles on the spirit of the Canadian military — perhaps with the consequences seen in the Somalia incident.

Continuing past the centre line, Granatstein next fixes his attention on Pierre Trudeau as the killer of the Canadian military through "malign neglect". Trudeau becomes the vehicle for discussing the influence of Québec on the forces. Granatstein's argument here is very well balanced; he points out that the military, established on British lines, and essentially English-speaking, has always been inhospitable to Québécois recruits. Québec's reaction to conscription in both world wars was not markedly out of line with that of native-born Canadians from other provinces — suggesting that there was a need to convince a wider segment of the public of the value to Canada



of the sacrifice demanded. Here, too, the author hints at an issue but perhaps fails to follow through on the check. In tracing Trudeau's quixotic foreign policy forays, Granatstein notes the failure of the government to appreciate the role of the military in supporting that policy. However, in noting that Canada can realistically deploy force only in the context of alliance or coalition operations, he fails to underline the difficulty that a Canadian government has in convincing its citizens that contributing to broader Alliance interests can also serve Canada's interests.

Professor Granatstein carries the argument over the blue line by accusing, in turn, Brian Mulroney and then Jean Chrétien of killing the Canadian military. The former is blamed, in essence, for having a short attention span — making promises that the economy could not support, and then becoming distracted by the implications of the Charter of Rights on the manning policy of the CF. Chrétien is accorded the duty of performing the 'last rites' for the CF, in which all of the previous themes come to roost: the breakdown of peacekeeping, a broken headquarters, misunderstanding the potential of the military for use in pursuing national aims (and consequently overextending it), the "Québec factor", and of course rampant anti-Americanism.

With Chrétien safely behind him, Granatstein takes his shot at the goal. And hits the goal post — probably intentionally. In his summation and prescription for recovery of the CF, he underscores the fact that while the military has had some role in its own demise, the politicians must "take the major share of the credit". That said, Granatstein does state that, "at root", Canadians themselves killed their military because of the politicians they elected, the lack of attention they paid, and the priorities they gave their governments. In this, he is most certainly correct. One thing the military teaches its leaders is the linkage between authority and responsibility. The former can be delegated, the latter cannot. The Canadian voter, with the ultimate authority, chose the Pearsons, Diefenbakers, Hellyers and the rest, who ultimately represented — with considerable fidelity — all the foibles of the Canadian public. However, Granatstein makes his case against

the Canadian voter gently, probably to avoid alienating the reader he is now attempting to cajole into accepting his solution for resurrecting the CF. That solution, he contends, begins with understanding what constitute Canada's true national interests (as opposed to "values"), and the part the military plays in promoting and protecting them. However, in proposing specific equipment fixes for the current problem, rather than sketching, in general principles, the capability the Canadian military should have (from which manpower and equipment can be derived), Granatstein risks seeing his book become very rapidly dated.

This is not an academic book, but rather one intended to guide the casual reader through a complex problem, and to stimulate deeper consideration of serious issues. Unfortunately, it does not have any bibliography or list of suggested readings that could guide the reader who does develop an interest. Nor is it supported by explanatory charts or photos, suggestive, perhaps, of a rather hurried development. Only two bar graphs — the Regular Force manpower size and the annual Defence budgets — are appended to the back of the book, but these are presented with no context. The casual reader could thus be left with the impression that while force size has been reduced, there is more money to work with — quite the opposite of what the author intended. The book would be improved with an 'appendectomy'.

So who killed the Canadian military? It becomes evident that the ultimate responsibility, and therefore accountability, lies with the Canadian public. However, the author leaves it to his graphic designer to make the point most bluntly, and put the rebound in the net. The dust jacket illustration is a First World War Canadian recruiting poster, showing a hard faced soldier pointing an accusing finger straight out of the page — at the reader. Who says you can't tell a book by its cover?

Commander Mark D. Tunnicliffe is with the Maritime Research Coordination Cell in NHDQ.

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. "It wasn't Mike Pearson who helped kill the Canadian military," 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.