

## Enfields, Emissaries, and Experiences: Canadian Perspectives on the Korean War

“Korea was an obscure place on the western side of the Pacific, a place of indeterminate status, best known because the people were known to wear strange hats.”<sup>1</sup> This quote from Brooke Claxton, Canada’s Minister of National Defence during the Korean War, summed up pre-war Canadian opinion of Korea nicely. For three years, however, Canadian soldiers fought, bled, and died to return stability to this obscure nation. Historians have only recently begun a serious and earnest discussion about these sacrifices. Scholarship on the Canadian military in the Korean War fell into three broad categories that functioned as differentiable lenses through which the history is written. The operational category focused on the performance of the troops, strategies, and logistics. The diplomatic category examined the role of the government in the military and in the international community. The micro-history or “soldier history” category described the experience of individual soldiers in relation to the fighting. These genres were not mutually exclusive, and indeed many works have characteristics from two or even all three. What resulted was both diversity and ambiguity in the historiography of Canada’s involvement. The discussions in each category were not mutually reinforcing, and often made other arguments cumbersome or out of place. Most importantly, however, historians have yet to provide an in-depth analysis of how Korea left its mark on Canada.

At the end of World War Two, the Allied powers divided Korea into North and South to facilitate the surrender of its occupying Japanese forces. The Soviets accepted the surrender north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and the US to the south. For the next five years, both sides—to some degree—attempted to facilitate the reunification process in Korea. Despite the efforts of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), on which Canada participated, by 1948 two separate

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<sup>1</sup> Brooke Claxton, quoted in Robert S. Prince, “The Limits of Constraint: Canadian-American Relations and the Korean War, 1950-51”, in *The Journal of Canadian Studies*, (Winter 1992): 135.

governments were in place. On 25 June 1950, the armies of North Korea launched a massive assault that left the South reeling even with US support. The United Nations Security Council managed to pass a resolution—since the Soviet representative Yakov Malik was absent—condemning North Korea and calling for coordinated action to stop the aggression. In this context Canada sent its troops, sailors, and airmen overseas to aid the South. The early war consisted of sweeping offensives on a north-south axis that also drew in communist China. Once the front became more stable, armistice talks began and the war became defensive and static. Over three years, the Canadians distinguished themselves in battles like Kap'yong, where the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) earned the US Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. The government contributed three rotations each of the PPCLI, the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR), and the Royale Vingt-deuxième Régiment (R22eR) as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade (25<sup>th</sup> CIB). Combined with supporting units, transport aircraft, fighter pilots, and a destroyer squadron, almost 27,000 Canadians served in Korea. The armistice, signed 27 July 1953, ended the fighting and divided the country slightly north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel with a 2-3 kilometre demilitarized zone.

The first work to address Canada's activity during the Korean War was H.F. Wood's *Strange Battleground*, wherein he argued that Canada's army acted professionally and performed well overall. Wood served as an officer in 3 PPCLI during the conflict, and wrote *Strange Battleground* as the official history, commissioned by the Canadian Army. As such, his position was unsurprising. What was unique about his work was the extreme detachment in Wood's writing. He was not critical about government or military policies—not once did he mention the drawn-out, frustrating controversy over the Lee-Enfield bolt-action rifles—nor did he connote a feeling of heroics. In his description of the battle of Kap'yong, for example, he included a rather dispassionate mention of “the gallant stand of the Australians and Canadians” that earned them the Presidential Citation.<sup>2</sup> Wood

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Farlie Wood, *Strange Battleground: The Operations in Korea and their Effects on the Defence Policy of Canada*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966): 79.

concluded that the soldiers were professionals, especially in the later two years; their actions were not based on existential threats, but were a transaction with the Government of Canada to unfold policies on the ground.<sup>3</sup> They did as they were told, not what was necessary to gain victory. This, when compared to the world wars, made the Korean battles strange indeed for Canadian soldiers.

As the writer of the official history, Wood was descriptive and not argumentative in his purpose. His neutral perspective indicated both his respect for the bravery of his former comrades and a reluctance to criticize in any depth Canada's official actions. This meant that some of his descriptions—as later studies showed—were not always accurate. Nor did Wood fully develop the effect that Korea had on Canada's defence policy. He pointed out that the war enhanced the military's training, discipline, and supply mechanisms, but also that it set precedent for future operations to be conducted through the auspices of the UN.<sup>4</sup> These were introduced late, however, and were not integrated fully into the discussion. As the first major military history, Wood's *Strange Battleground* nevertheless established a clear point of embarkation on Canada's participation in the Korean War.

The tactical history of the war remained strangely quiet for almost a quarter century after Wood. Most works on Canadian military history included a brief nod to Korea, but little more.<sup>5</sup> This shifted in 1991 with Jack Granatstein and David Bercuson's *War and Peacekeeping*, which focused on Canada's "limited wars." They included three sizeable chapters on Korea that resembled Wood's original argument quite closely. They were, however, more sceptical about the upper strata of the military/political establishment, and took a more critical look at Canada's soldiers. In the second battalions, for example "Canadians were to have the highest venereal disease rate of all the

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<sup>3</sup> Wood, *Strange Battleground*, 79.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, *Strange Battleground*, 258-259.

<sup>5</sup> Consider Desmond Morton's *Canada and War*, published in 1981. In his 200 page overview of Canada's military past, roughly four pages dealt with Korea, and this was only in the context of the Cold War.

U.N. troops in Korea.”<sup>6</sup> The Canadian army as a whole suffered from “abnormally high rates of men absent without leave (AWOL), and Canadian prison stockades were unusually full.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Bercuson and Granatstein still gave praise to the fighting character of the men for their firmness during the fluid offensives of the early war and their “specialized craft” of patrolling for the later war.<sup>8</sup> This certainly set a precedent for future critiques of the army in Korea.

David Bercuson’s *Blood on the Hills* took off from this point and expanded the critical analysis. Bercuson is a professor at the University of Calgary and one of Canada’s foremost military historians. He adopted the same respectful attitude as Wood towards the soldiers, but was much more critical about their performance. Bercuson made it very clear that any inadequacies began in the higher echelons of the government and military. The initial government reaction to the war was “confused and hesitant,” a mood that he claimed remained for the duration of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> The army was unprepared for a military commitment so soon after the demobilization in 1945/46, so when the UN issued a ‘come as you are’ call to the Korean theatre, “Canada was naked.”<sup>10</sup> While Wood’s account did not exactly cover up the inefficiencies of the army—it simply placed the emphasis elsewhere—Bercuson probed deeper. He discussed these tactical and administrative problems through the lack of training, poor equipment, and discipline problems faced by the army.

Bercuson narrowed down the operational problems to lack of training. On the basic level, each soldier had received weapons and tactical training that some of Canada’s allies lacked at various stages of the war. However, “the simple truth is that Canadian soldiers had been trained for almost everything but a war of constant patrolling.”<sup>11</sup> The training program did not adequately adapt to the

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<sup>6</sup> Jack L. Granatstein and David J. Bercuson, *War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf—Canada’s Limited Wars*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1991): 104.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Granatstein and Bercuson, *War and Peacekeeping*, 158.

<sup>9</sup> David J. Bercuson. *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999): 27.

<sup>10</sup> Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills*, 192.

Korean environment or to the nature. Nor was the military strategy conducive to fighting an effective campaign. Particularly in the later part of the war, UN Command abandoned their comparative advantages and “were starting to fight a Chinese-style war.”<sup>12</sup> This, he argues, “was the inevitable result of the political decision to do as little as possible to upset the status quo on the front line.”<sup>13</sup>

William Johnston intensified the debate in this category when he wrote *A War of Patrols* as a self-claimed repudiation of Wood and Bercuson. His goal was to place Canadian operations into the larger context of the Korean War and simultaneously analyze the battlefield performance of the soldiers themselves.<sup>14</sup> His conclusion to the latter element was that in fact the Special Force battalions—2 PPCLI, 2 R22eR, and 2 RCR—performed much better than their Active Force counterparts. Johnston threw out the ‘professional’ designation afforded to the 25<sup>th</sup> Brigade as a whole when he discussed the regulars. Interestingly, he cites much of the same evidence, such as training and discipline, but with a highly revisionist interpretation.

While certainly intriguing, Johnston’s distinction between the three troop rotations remains highly problematic. First, he seemed to misinterpret Wood’s and Bercuson’s use of the term ‘professional.’ In particular, he argued that “the professionalism of the Canadian regulars was more readily visible in matters of appearance than in their battlefield performance.”<sup>15</sup> His predecessors, however, used the term in its minimalist sense, referring to the fact that the soldiers—particularly of the Active Force—were paid by the Canadian government to perform a specific duty in the conflict. It was not a conventional total war being fought along WWII characteristics even (arguably) during the early stages, and the Canadian soldiers served as political as well as military instruments for Ottawa and the UN. Second, he misconstrued Bercuson’s argument. Bercuson never accused the

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<sup>12</sup> Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills*, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> William Johnston, *A War of Patrols: Canadian Army Operations in Korea*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003): xviii-xix.

<sup>15</sup> Johnston, *A War of Patrols*, 256.

second battalions of inadequacy. Indeed, they “performed miracles,” “did much better than might have been expected of them,” and suffered undeserved loss of reputation for their misfits.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Bercuson noted that even though the Active Force was well trained, they were certainly not trained *for Korea*.<sup>17</sup>

The most important idea that Johnston developed—and one that raises questions about military history in general—was his direct comparison between the first and second battalions. He made direct operational and tactical criticisms that disregarded the differences in the type of war they were each fighting. His argument that the Special Force produced “a far higher proportion of keen, physically fit soldiers than the regular force” almost fully ignores the fact that they were fighting two very different wars.<sup>18</sup> The Special Forces, as slapped-together as they may have been, fought a fluid war that enabled them to utilize their training, whereas the regulars (and third battalions) fought a static, politically correct war of patrols for which their training was largely irrelevant. It is arguably difficult for military historians to evaluate units serving simultaneously, but to compare performance from two different operational contexts altogether is unfair at worst and unconvincing at best. It distorted the matrix of planning, circumstance, environment, and coincidence that determines battles and affects the performance of troops in those battles. In this particular situation, it also ignored the fact that many of the lower officers were actually transferred *from* the regulars to the Special Force. Conversely, returning members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions and many members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions departed with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalions to bolster the Active Force’s numbers. Such fluidity makes comparisons extremely complicated.

Where *A War of Patrols* certainly succeeded, however, was to entrench in readers a more accurate Canadian placement within the broader UN operations. Johnston clearly articulated that “the Canadian brigade arrived on the peninsula after the hard-fought battles of the Pusan Perimeter

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<sup>16</sup> Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills*, 225.

<sup>17</sup> Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills*, 226.

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, *A War of Patrols*, 180.

and the precipitous retreat from North Korea had concluded...and had also been shielded from some of the less sound operations proposed by higher American headquarters by its inclusion in the Commonwealth Division.”<sup>19</sup> Canada’s contribution was thus small, but not irrelevant. If his comparison was troublesome, it still uncovered the fact that Rockingham, Bogert, and Allard each conducted operations in their own style and with varying motives.

Brent Watson brought another notable contribution to the tactical history category in his *Far Eastern Tour*. This excellent work bridged the tactical category and the “soldier history” category, even if its focus was on the latter. Watson highlighted that if Canadian soldiers were “improperly trained and equipped for battle, they were equally unprepared for the non-combat aspects of service in the Far East.”<sup>20</sup> Published in 2002, Watson preceded Johnston’s work, but his ideas occupied a middle ground between *A War of Patrols* and *Blood on the Hills*. Much of the disorganization or mismanagement came from above, as Bercuson suggested, and he made few distinctions between the first, second, and third battalions. The troops, however, had a “decidedly lacklustre performance.”<sup>21</sup> This was mainly due to the fact that “Canadians never succeeded in modifying their tactics to suit conditions in Korea.”<sup>22</sup> He pointed particularly to the Active Force’s failure to adapt, but still noted that it was a common problem in all battalions.

The debates in the operational history of the Korean War revolved around the overall performance and context of the Canadian soldiers, as well as cross-battalion comparisons. As mentioned here, there were considerable problems with these comparisons, as any true contextualization tended to blur or nullify the distinctions made between the Active Force and Special Force battalions. These two areas of debate nevertheless remained the focus of discussion, and to a certain extent this carried over into diplomatic and micro histories as well. Although

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<sup>19</sup> Johnston, *A War of Patrols*, 372.

<sup>20</sup> Brent Byron Watson, *Far Eastern Tour: The Canadian Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002): 47.

<sup>21</sup> Watson, *Far Eastern Tour*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> Watson, *Far Eastern Tour*, 79.

Johnston's book seems to have formed the capstone of the operational history, there remains a major gap in scholarship. As the title suggested, Wood's *Strange Battleground: The Operations in Korea and Their Effects on the Defence Policy of Canada* indicated that it would comment on how the Korean War affected Canada's future struggles and policies. It did, but only in several pages towards the end of the book, and no authors have come forward since to expand on this issue.

Diplomatic historians provided a very different lens through which to view the Korean War. These studies focused on how Canada interacted on the international stage, and how it came to formulate the policies that it did. With little focus on the fighting itself, readers received a top-down view of the action that stands in stark contrast to the micro histories. Jeffrey Grey's *Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War* contained elements of both operational and diplomatic history, and therefore formed a suitable starting point. As an Australian military historian, Grey brought a doubly different perspective. He argued that by the outbreak of the Korean War, Canada had "drifted from the Commonwealth connection."<sup>23</sup> Not only was Canada hesitant to commit itself to a British-oriented force, it feared the actual term "commonwealth" would undermine the collectiveness of the UN operation. Furthermore, since they already had a brigade that could operate in "independent action," Canada was less willing than the Australians to adopt the Commonwealth division.<sup>24</sup> It did not help that Canadians were slower to contribute troops to the arena than Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

While the voices of the Canadian historians were in relative harmony that its troops performed well—even Johnston would admit that the regulars kept themselves clean and polished—Grey's opinion differed immensely. Canadian inadequacy, Grey argued, often disrupted the usually harmonious relations of the Commonwealth battalions. The Australians considered taking over a

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War: An Alliance Study*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988): 92.

<sup>24</sup> Grey, *Commonwealth*, 41.

previously Canadian-held position equivalent “to occupying a fresh midden.”<sup>25</sup> More important were Canada’s defensive arrangements, which were “generally inadequate and prompted complaints from the battalions of other brigades.”<sup>26</sup> These disputes occurred at the diplomatic level as well. When the Australian commander of the Commonwealth Division, General William Bridgeford, posted a company of Canadian soldiers on the Koje-do POW island, Pearson and the Department of National Defence objected vehemently but “found themselves isolated in their stand.”<sup>27</sup> Such a strong view of Canada as diplomatically and militarily uncooperative complicated the entire discussion of the Korean War, and potentially gave strong backing to Johnston’s assessment.

The main diplomatic debate, however, revolved around where Canada placed its allegiances. Some argued that it lay with the United States, others with the United Nations. “The Cat’s Paw,” by John Price, outlined Canada’s involvement on UNTCOK. His fundamental argument was that the government supported “the US perspective on Korea because of the perception that Canadian and US strategic goals were the same in the region.”<sup>28</sup> When complications did arise—such as Canada’s pending withdrawal should UNTCOK supervise elections solely in the south—Pearson and St. Laurent bowed to American pressure and completely reversed their policies. Inevitably, “Canadian foreign policy in UNTCOK became what might be more aptly described as the politics of expediency, in which Korean interests were subordinated to those of Canada and the continent.”<sup>29</sup> While this study did not touch on the war itself, it illustrated that the “scene was set” for Canadian policy once the actual fighting began.<sup>30</sup>

Denis Stairs’ *Diplomacy of Constraint* remains the monumental work in the diplomatic discussion of the Korean War. Stairs is a Professor of Political Science at Dalhousie University, and

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<sup>25</sup> Grey, *Commonwealth*, 150.

<sup>26</sup> Grey, *Commonwealth*, 151.

<sup>27</sup> Grey, *Commonwealth*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> John Price, “The ‘Cat’s Paw’: Canada and the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea,” in *The Canadian Historical Review* vol. 85, no. 2, (2004): 300.

<sup>29</sup> Price, “Cat’s Paw,” 324.

<sup>30</sup> Price, “Cat’s Paw,” 318.

has written extensively on Canadian defence and foreign policy. *Diplomacy of Constraint* was one of his earlier works, published in 1974, but it stands arguably unopposed a quarter century later. Much of his research came directly from participants, particularly Lester B. Pearson. This was certainly valuable for its insider opinion, but it also introduced some biases that later studies would point out. In his “Canada and the Korean War: Fifty Years On,” Stairs acknowledged many of these criticisms but claimed that they did not alter his previous thesis.<sup>31</sup> More importantly—and perhaps most impressively—he was able to navigate through the quagmire of individual, national, regional, and international memorandums, memoirs, correspondences, and meeting minutes and organize these primary sources, as well as secondary sources, into a cohesive narrative.

As the title suggests, Stairs argued that the Canadian diplomats had at heart a multifaceted desire for constraint in this new ‘limited war’. These facets included containment of North Korean aggression, minimizing Canadian direct involvement outside of the more important European sphere, and—crucially—keeping American actions under UN auspices. Canada, therefore, threw its effort into strengthening the legitimacy of the UN mission and worked diligently to keep America within its confines. It was idealistic in that Ottawa hoped that the UN forces would be “a genuine example of collective security enforcement,” political in that the authority of the UN “reinforce[d] at home the legitimacy of the Canadian military contribution,” and diplomatic in that a dominant role for the UN could only strengthen Canadian influence in the conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Through the diplomatic lens Stairs brought some unique perspectives that went surprisingly unexplored in the operational history. The poor coordination of weapons and equipment, for example, was the result of new agreements to sell off World War Two stockpiles to fund a new armament industry.<sup>33</sup> Pure bad luck in timing left Canada caught in the middle of a transition to

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<sup>31</sup> Denis Stairs, “Canada and the Korean War: Fifty Years On,” in *Canadian Military History* vol. 9, no. 3, (2000): 50.

<sup>32</sup> Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War, and the United States*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974): 94.

<sup>33</sup> Stairs, *Diplomacy*, 200.

American rather than British-fashioned equipment. The government thus had to rely on often unwilling partners for its war supplies. More importantly, it flushed out why exactly the front became static and the Canadian army was forced into a defensive transition. Especially after the Chinese entered the war, the guiding Canadian principles—however unrealistic they might have seemed—were: “(a) stabilization of the military front; (b) initiation of cease-fire negotiations; (c) conclusion of a cease-fire; and (d) general political negotiations to settle a number of outstanding Far East questions.”<sup>34</sup> It was this stabilization attempt that turned Korea into a dragging war of attrition and prevented soldiers from fighting the way they were trained.

Robert Prince, in his article “The Limits of Constraint,” nuanced Stairs’ argument. He did not refute the constraint thesis, but noted that there were in fact limitations on Canadian desire for constraint. His argument took a two-pronged approach. First, he demonstrated that many of Canada’s goals were actually very close to the US’s. In particular, Canada viewed collective security “through the lens of the international communist menace,” just as the Americans did.<sup>35</sup> Second, he described that even though Pearson was very much at the helm of the Department of External Affairs, there was still “unspoken restraint [from the cabinet] on Pearson’s ability to oppose American actions,” and so there were intrinsic internal constraints as well.<sup>36</sup>

What emerged out of Prince’s argument was a window into the complexity of post-WWII diplomacy. It was not bilateral, unilateral, or multilateral, but a curious and cumbersome blend of all three. For historians to look back through the sources requires them to encounter different attitudes within Canada—sometimes from the exact same person—that stand in clear contradiction. Pearson, for example, touted collective security when he was at Lake Success, wariness of America when in

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<sup>34</sup> Stairs, *Diplomacy*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Prince, “Limits”, 142.

<sup>36</sup> Prince, “Limits,” 134.

Ottawa, and support for the US campaign when in Washington.<sup>37</sup> Were there then three separate layers of counter-analysis and motive that historians must analyze? If there were, could this explain some of the battlefield planning and complications? It would seem that Stairs and Prince exposed a shaky link in the historiography—the concrete effects (or perhaps lack thereof) of Canadian diplomacy upon the soldiers in Korea.

So central was Pearson's involvement on the diplomatic front that his opinion cannot be ignored in the historical debate. Pearson made it very clear in his memoirs that, in his opinion, Canada "had to keep the US action within the framework of the UN."<sup>38</sup> The most interesting issue in Pearson's writing was his frustration that the US often acted unilaterally. Even when agreements were made, the Americans often reversed them without consultation, leaving Pearson personally fuming.<sup>39</sup> As the war unfolded, there was also a fundamental differentiation in Pearson's mind between Washington and the American military campaign under MacArthur.<sup>40</sup> As an insider, such personal expressions are extremely valuable, but potentially problematic. Pearson too often portrayed his opinion as Canada's opinion, when it was clear that many other members of the Department of External Affairs "were not at all times in perfect accordance with his views."<sup>41</sup>

George Egerton's "Lester B. Pearson and the Korean War" examined Pearson's role from a very different perspective. He elaborated on Prince's point that Ottawa was not unified and illustrated Pearson's importance through his ability to synchronize the collective security principles

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<sup>37</sup> From the beginning, Pearson had mentioned (privately) to the American Ambassador to Washington, Stanley Woodward, that "Canada wld not 'let US down.'" See Prince, "Limits," 144.

<sup>38</sup> Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Volume 2*, John Mungro and Alex Inglis, Ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973): 147.

<sup>39</sup> Pearson, *Mike*, 159-162. Pearson and the Americans had agreed not to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel for 3-4 days after the success at Inchon. However, the Americans reversed their decision and announced to the UN that they would pursue the North Koreans immediately.

<sup>40</sup> Pearson, *Mike*, 179.

<sup>41</sup> Prince, "Limits," 135.

of the UN to those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance structure.<sup>42</sup> It was remarkable that the problems of collective security fifty years ago remain unsolved into the present. Egerton and almost every diplomatic historian made it clear that in Korea collective security had been only partially realized—and subsequently failed—due to Cold-War polarization. There is presently no effective collective security agreement, despite the end of the Cold War nearly twenty years ago. This posed some problems for historians. Who are the Yakov Maliks and Stalins of today? If they cannot be found, were there deeper reasons than the Cold War that shook the idea of collective security in 1950 and persist into the present? Is it inaccurate to compare collective security in Korea to similar attempts today? What is most needed, therefore, is a discussion about how the Korean War carried over into new policies and positions in diplomacy. *The Role of Canada in the Korean War* was Denis Stairs' initial work that preceded but adopted a similar viewpoint to *Diplomacy of Constraint*. Perhaps it is time for "*The Role of the Korean War in Canada*."

These debates, provocative and intriguing as they were, became unwieldy and even inaccurate in light of the third category of writing. The "soldier history" or micro-history brought such focus to the debate that the macro-narratives seemed irrelevant in light of the multiplicity of experience. Watson's *Far Eastern Tour*, was a bridge between the micro and the macro. His social history illustrated the remarkable consistency in age, marital status, education, and experience between the Active Force and Special Force.<sup>43</sup> With peace talks in progress, many commanders "wished to avoid risking the lives of their men in what might be the last days of the war."<sup>44</sup> Watson combined an exploration of poor food and sanitation, venereal disease, alcohol distribution, casualties, antiquated equipment, and inadequate training. This provided a much more personal and emotional *experience* of the soldiers. While the reader was certainly drawn into the above criticisms,

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<sup>42</sup> George Egerton, "Lester B. Pearson and the Korean War: Dilemmas of collective security and international enforcement in Canadian foreign policy, 1950-53," in *International Peacekeeping* vol. 4, no. 1 (1997): 54-55.

<sup>43</sup> Watson, *Far Eastern Tour*, 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> Watson, *Far Eastern Tour*, 94.

this type of writing completely stripped away arguments from macro-histories. Who were the “misfits” if educational levels between the battalions were almost identical? Who were the “professionals” if venereal disease was a common problem?<sup>45</sup>

John Melady and Ted Barris raised similar issues, but their writing was markedly different from Watson. Both authors conducted extensive interviews with participants of the Korean War, and indeed much of the story was told through these smaller narratives. Melady was a former teacher, educated in English and history. His *Korea: Canada's Forgotten War* was one of his only military histories, and it came at a time when few popular or academic historians discussed Korea. It not only remembered the war, but also remembered the experiences of the soldiers who fought in it. Melady did not give detailed accounts of the battles, evaluations of troop performance, or theoretical tracts on collective security. Instead, he relayed participation in the war—the good and the bad—as the soldiers themselves saw it. It was “the war that was their war,” and if the government and popular culture failed to acknowledge them, Melady certainly tried to “respect what they did for us as a nation.”<sup>46</sup>

While one would expect such a viewpoint to be depressing, it was surprisingly light. Melady even managed to weave elements of humour into his narrative. In one particular incident, a friendly plane crash landed near some houses of “ill repute” beside the Canadian camp. While there were no injuries, “suddenly there were fifteen or twenty guys in various states of undress bailing out of these houses and running like the devil.”<sup>47</sup> Another story recalled members of the service corps driving completely intoxicated through no-man’s-land looking for their ammunition drop location. It was only when an American patrol told them to “put out [their] cigarettes, turn off [their] dim lights, put on [their] helmets, and get the hell out of there” that they realized how far off course they were.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Watson, *Far Eastern Tour*, 138.

<sup>46</sup> John Melady, *Korea: Canada's Forgotten War*, (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1983): 177.

<sup>47</sup> Ernie Glover, quoted in Melady, *Korea*, 118-119.

<sup>48</sup> Frank Cassidy, quoted in Melady, *Korea*, 162.

Ted Barris developed his work along a similar line. As an accomplished journalist, Barris brought his talent to bear unearthing some of the untold stories of the war. *Deadlock in Korea* was one of his first military histories, but it complemented Melady's study almost perfectly, expanding in areas that had hitherto received only passing mention. He dedicated an entire chapter, for example, to a study of the entertainment and welfare sent overseas to keep up the morale of the soldiers. Barris also managed to lighten the emotion for the reader, including humorous stories about the non-combat interaction between the Canadians and Communists. On the line, the Chinese often left comical or poorly-spelled messages for the Canadians during the night. In a POW camp, Canadian soldiers grew tired of their captors' incessant prying about germ warfare. They caught a mouse, fastened it with a miniature UN parachute, hung it in a prominent area, and watched flabbergasted as the Chinese guards descended excitedly on this 'para-mouse' as clear proof of biological warfare. The jibe was clearly lost on the communists.<sup>49</sup>

These micro-histories were much more than light hearted humour; they illustrated that some of the top-down decisions had measurable effects on Canadian soldiers. The operational decision to use the Lee-Enfield clearly left soldiers feeling underequipped and betrayed, and forced them to barter for American semi-automatic M1s and M2s. The diplomatic debates over General MacArthur also caused considerable consternation. Some soldiers who had believed that they were part of a legitimate international mission were confused and concerned that the American president had fired their boss.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, since these policies affected different individuals in different ways, it becomes incredibly difficult to characterize them as "good" policies or "bad" policies. Perhaps poorly patrolled no-man's-land gave the Chinese the attacking advantage, but it also kept Canadian patrol casualties much lower.

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<sup>49</sup> Ted Barris, *Deadlock in Korea: Canadians at War, 1950-1953*, (Toronto: MacMillan Canada, 1999) 272.

<sup>50</sup> Barris, *Deadlock*, 92.

Micro histories also demonstrated that the problems of the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade as a whole sometimes played out within the hearts and minds of individual soldiers. Paul Whitney Lackenbauer, professor of Canadian history at St. Jerome's University, illustrated this through his examination of Tommy Prince. Prince was a decorated aboriginal WWII veteran that reenlisted with 2PPCLI in Korea. He went against the character of the other soldiers in the battalion in that he was "the seasoned 'hunter' back in his element."<sup>51</sup> Prince's heroism during Kap'yong and his unyielding drive on the battlefield earned him a mixture of respect and wariness. Daring though he was, many suggested that unnecessary risks to himself and to his men represented a "zealous approach to combat [that] seemed out of sync with the new realities of the Korean battlefield."<sup>52</sup> Lackenbauer's study thus indicated within one man the psychological and physical results of a diplomacy of constraint, poor military planning, and abhorrent social conditions that culminated in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for one of Canada's most decorated war heroes.

Hub Gray, Les Peate, and Robert Hepenstall also contributed to the micro-focused discussion. All three men actually fought in Korea, and their accounts provided important perspectives and raised startling questions. Hub Gray, a former Lieutenant at Kap'yong, vividly portrayed his own experiences and those of his comrades during the battle. His tone was intensely revisionist, seeking to correct some of the "grossly inaccurate" descriptions of the battle.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, he argued that 10 Platoon D Company 2PPCLI was not in fact overrun by the Chinese, but held fast throughout the night.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, he thought that Private Kenneth Barwise's heroic recovery of a machine gun was a case of soldiers "embellish[ing] their performance."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Whitney Lackenbauer, "'A Hell of a Warrior': Remembering Sergeant Thomas George Prince," in *Journal of Historical Biography* vol. 1, no. 1, (2007): 44.

<sup>52</sup> Lackenbauer, "'Hell of a Warrior'", 49.

<sup>53</sup> Hub Gray, *Beyond the Danger Close: The Korean Experience Revealed*, (Calgary: Bunker to Bunker, 2003): xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Gray, *Beyond*, 99-115.

<sup>55</sup> Gray, *Beyond*, 131.

Gray's account raised two main issues. The first was the actual relevance of his revisions. Was it a grievous historical error for Barwise to embellish his actions during the fight? More importantly, some of Gray's extreme nuances of popular, official, and academic histories did not make a significant difference to the bigger debates. While the corrections are important, they do not necessarily alter how Kap'young unfolded, nor how the soldiers experienced the battle.<sup>56</sup> Are these details then necessary, especially when portrayed in such a passionate and vehement manner? Are these details the Belleville housemaid's knee of military history?<sup>57</sup>

The second issue was the reliability of eyewitness accounts in the writing of military history. As mentioned in the diplomatic section, firsthand accounts are riddled with biases and particular focuses. Pride, emotion, and ambiguity enter the writing milieu for all types of history. For military history in particular, these factors are intensified tenfold due to the powerful fears, hopes, triumphs and the chaos that is the fog of war. As Gray himself pointed out, "only those who have experienced the battlefield can share in it."<sup>58</sup> This is not a problem unique to the Korean War. Bomber pilots during WWII, for example, often passionately oppose any historical account that questions the morality of bombing German cities. Who is more qualified to write the history? As Tim Cook said in his *Clio's Warriors*, "there can be a terrible sense of frustration, even helplessness, for some veterans or their family members to have non-combatants pick through 'their' history, like scavengers through bones, and to arrive at conclusions that question their accepted stories."<sup>59</sup> This appears to be one such instance of frustration. Can the opinions and memories of soldiers really be

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<sup>56</sup> One particular alteration is worthy of note. Gray described how one of his patrols uncovered a small Chinese company of 56 men all dead but apparently unharmed. The bizarre scene, as he illustrated it, has remained unexplained by governments on either side, and stands as one of the mysteries that is rarely mentioned in other narratives. See Gray, *Beyond*, 186-189.

<sup>57</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998): 72-73. Granatstein controversially referred to the narrow focus of some social historians as the "the history of a housemaid's knee in Belleville in the 1890s." While he acknowledged his overstatement, he nevertheless maintains that the focus has become narrow as to be irrelevant to larger historical questions.

<sup>58</sup> Gray, *Beyond*, 154.

<sup>59</sup> Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006): 251.

trusted more than fifty years after the fighting ended? Conversely, can historians ever appreciate the intense emotions of a battle if they have never experienced it themselves? These problems of broader military history certainly reared their heads in the historical debate on the Korean War, and with no definitive solution.

Leslie Peate, an infantry NCO for the British Army during the Korean War, brought a strange insider-outsider perspective that heightened this issue. *The War that Wasn't* was more akin to an operational history, but told through the perspectives of combatants.<sup>60</sup> His main argument was that Korea was not a 'conflict' or 'operation' or 'police action'; for the soldiers who served, it was a war.<sup>61</sup> Peate's account seemed somewhat redundant in light of the multitude of other work (*The War that Wasn't* was published in 2005) that also dealt with Korea as a war. Some of his descriptions were also incredibly different than those of other authors. While Stairs claimed that the government struggled to constrain American policy, Peate argued that "Canada's leaders were both relieved and impressed" with America's actions.<sup>62</sup> While Bercuson described the chaos of the recruitment process, Peate purposed that problems "were overcome by a combination of strong leadership, energetic staff work and, in many cases, turning a Nelsonian blind eye to regulations...where appropriate."<sup>63</sup> Whereas Johnston criticized Canadian patrolling, Peate lightly wrote that they "snatched prisoners or did a little sniping."<sup>64</sup> Such different and seemingly offhanded perspectives on so many issues made Peate's work suspect in terms of its contributions to the larger debates. On the other hand, his humorous discussions of "Santa Mao" and other wartime irregularities make for an interesting read.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Having served in an allied army and in the Canadian army after 1954, some of these opinions were his as well as his interviewees. As a fellow combatant, he shared in that shared battlefield experience that Gray wrote about.

<sup>61</sup> Les Peate, *The War that Wasn't: Canadians in Korea*, (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps, 2005): 225.

<sup>62</sup> Peate, *The War that Wasn't*, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Peate, *The War that Wasn't*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Peate, *The War that Wasn't*, 56.

<sup>65</sup> Peate, *The War that Wasn't*, 62.

If Peate's discussion of the Canadian brigade skipped haphazardly over the bigger questions, Robert Hepenstall provided provocative and controversial answers. Another veteran of WWII and Korea, Hepenstall published *Find the Dragon* in 1995 and thus preceded the recent flurry of Bercuson, Watson, and Johnston. Hepenstall's characterization of the Special Force was very much that of the swashbuckling adventurer, and not the professional soldier.<sup>66</sup> His absolutely scathing criticism of the military establishment was best summed up in his statement that soldiers knew they were "in an institution that cares nothing for them."<sup>67</sup> Such would explain the poor food, weapons, and training that they received during their service in Korea. The Korean War also saw the introduction of life-saving technologies like the bulletproof vest and the medical helicopter, as well as antibiotics and new drug treatments. Hepenstall instead argued that Canadians had "very poor medical treatment" in that they were emotionally and socially discouraged from taking sick leave.<sup>68</sup> The soldiers themselves were not a perfect lot. Problems among the troops included drinking and sleeping on duty, bitter rivalries, and even murder.<sup>69</sup>

These three categories all discussed the broad themes about Canada's involvement in the Korean War. Through the operational, diplomatic, and micro accounts, three distinct lenses emerge through which to view the Canadian contribution. What is probably most remarkable about the Canadian history of the Korean War is the extent to which it is almost completely ignored in broader scholarship. J.M. Bumsted's *A History of the Canadian Peoples* is one of the popular textbooks used for introductory courses on Canadian history. Only two paragraphs mentioned the Korean War, and they were only in the context of Cold War diplomacy.<sup>70</sup> Norman Hillmer and Jack Granatstein's *Empire to Umpire*, a fantastic account of Canadian foreign policy, offered only five pages, most of

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon: The Canadian Army in Korea, 1950-1953*, (Edmonton: Four Winds, 1995): 13-15.

<sup>67</sup> Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon*, 177.

<sup>68</sup> Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon*, 261.

<sup>69</sup> For drinking, see Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon*, 68. For rivalries between air force and army, as well as soldiers and officers, see 176-178. For murder, see page 264.

<sup>70</sup> J.M. Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples, Third Edition*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007): 372.

which followed Denis Stairs' constraint argument.<sup>71</sup> Even in Desmond Morton's more recent Canadian military history, *A Military History of Canada*, the Korean War received only six pages of discussion.<sup>72</sup> How is it that historians have so neglected the largest Canadian war effort since WWII when dealing with national narratives? Why have the arguments, debates, and multiple perspectives failed to carry over into the broader discussion of Canadian history?

Quite simply, there is a very large gap in the historiography that could be preventing this translation. As Tim Cook stated, "twentieth century wars shaped Canadian society."<sup>73</sup> Korea was a twentieth century war, and yet historians have remained strangely quiet on just how it affected Canada. Each author brought small pieces of the answer to this question, but there has yet to be a synthesis that compiles them into a monograph assessing the significance of the war writ large. Combining the three broad categories into a single narrative about the war itself would be a tedious and perhaps impossible task, akin to synthesizing any modern Canadian national history. An evaluation on how each different element of the war affected Canada, on the other hand, is much more manageable. Johnston did an effective job of placing the 25<sup>th</sup> CIB in the larger operational context during the war. It is time historians built on this and placed the war into the larger Canadian context as well.

The debates surrounding Canada's participation in the Korean War are lively and complicated. Operational histories presented several distinct analyses of the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade's performance record and significance. The diplomatic histories illustrated Canada's interactions in a new multilateral world body whose actions defined and redefined the entire scope and purpose of the war. Lastly, the micro histories depicted the war through its effects on the soldiers and through the understandings of the combatants themselves. Each viewpoint developed

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<sup>71</sup> Norman Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2008): 185-189.

<sup>72</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada: From Champlain to Kosovo*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999): 234-239.

<sup>73</sup> Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, 254.

its own unique debates and questions, many of which were shared and dealt with provocative and stimulating questions. It is clear that Korea no longer remains Canada's forgotten war, but nor has it been remembered for its effects on Canada. As the first demonstrable example of global collective security, the first major clash between Cold War proxies, and the first test of Canadian soldiers in a modern non-conventional war, these effects certainly exist and are worthy of further examination.

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