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James Wood. *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011. 368 pp. $35.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7748-1766-0.

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Pratt on Wood

The patrimony of the Canadian militia myth is conventionally traced back to the first Anglican bishop of Toronto, John Strachan (1778-1867), who attributed British success in the War of 1812 to the stalwart Loyalist militia. The notion that citizen soldiers were the best way to defend the country has resonated in the country ever since. Indeed, Jack Granatstein's survey *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* opens with the statement that, "the central myth in the history of Canadian arms is, and always has been, that the colonists and citizens provide their own defence."[1] In the twentieth century, the old story of a Canadian Expeditionary Force composed of sturdy woodsmen, farmer's sons, and other pastoral citizenry that answered the call of Britain in 1914 has long been refuted by Canadian military historians. A recent work in the Studies in Canadian Military History series, co-published by the University of British Columbia Press and Canadian War Museum, proves, however, that Canada's militia myth has a much longer intellectual genealogy, and was by no means a static concept. As its author writes, "Although Canadians retained their confidence in citizen soldiers throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, the range of justifications they expressed in defence of that faith points not to a single all-encompassing militia myth but, rather, to a collection of competing and even contrary ideas by which they ordered their understanding of war" (p. 143).

James Wood's *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921* examines the ideal of the trained militiaman in military rhetoric of the day, and the eventual replacement of this icon after the First World War by the archetype of the untrained civilian. The idea of the citizen soldier is defined by Wood as "a belief in the conviction that good citizens should provide for their own defence" (p. 10). Wood focuses largely on the literary and cultural elements of Canadian military journals, especially rhetoric found in the *Canadian Military Gazette,* which is systematically analyzed here for the first time. The work stems from the author's dissertation at Wilfrid Laurier University supervised by Roger Sarty, which is indicated by exhaustive citation and academic prose.

In search of the lineage of the militia myth, Wood delves much further than the War of 1812 into the traditions bestowed to the North American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, regular soldiers were regarded with a "mix of contempt and fear" (p .5). Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army connected standing armies to tyranny in the minds of many, and such ideas, when transplanted to North American soil, encouraged praise for the British North American militia in the War of 1812, and later the Dominion of Canada's nascent military exploits in the late nineteenth century. After noting these British antecedents, however, Wood writes that "In its Canadian context, the militia myth refers to a dangerously faulty memory of the War of 1812 and the ill-founded confidence of Canadians in the abilities of amateur citizen soldiers" (p. 11).

In the Dominion this myth did not go unchallenged. The small instructional cadre of the Permanent Force and representatives of the British Army (especially the British General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia) fought against the notion that partially trained citizen soldiers were enough for the purposes of Canadian defense. To these groups, Wood adds "an identifiable group of professionally minded militia officers whose efforts Canadian historians have mostly overlooked," who did not call for a professional standing army, yet railed against public apathy towards defense (p. 6).

Before the Boer War, the Canadian militia ideal was rooted in the home defense tradition, and strongly connected to marksmanship. Public apathy was shaken with

the Venezuela Crisis of 1895-96 and the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898. A revival of military interest emerged in the early years of the Laurier government. This enthusiasm was largely expressed in the proliferation of rifle shooting, both in paramilitary rifle clubs, and as formal training endeavors. Military reform was stifled by an aversion to standing armies until general officer commanding, Major General Sir Edward Thomas Henry Hutton, skillfully used the rhetoric of a "national army" to promote change. Hutton is shown to leverage a national appeal for the militia, working hard to popularize it in Quebec. He urged Canadians to take up universal military training on the Swiss model and encouraged marksmanship. Wood argues that while Hutton was successful in invigorating militarism in Canada, he was influenced by ideas that were already rooted in the debates of colonial militiamen. Despite this awakening, before the Boer War, the Canadian militia was, "more deeply involved in its social role than its military function" (p. 29).

The Boer War itself fostered notions that an armed citizenry could best regular soldiers, yet raised the problem of deploying a home defense militia overseas. Instead of the notion in the historical literature which suggests that militia officers believed in an untrained citizen soldier, the debate after the Boer War was instead focused on what degree of training was required (p. 94). The Dominion Militia Act of 1904 enshrined ideas that the colonial troops had performed well in the Boer War, and promoted the idea of a citizen army.

Wood argues that despite the contentions of historian C. P. Stacey, the period before 1909-10 was characterized by a conception of home defense against an American invasion. With the outbreak of the Great War, the focus shifted from a home defense force to an expeditionary force, and the eclipse of the active militia in popular esteem by the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In the years before the war, rhetoric increasingly dwelt on the responsibilities of citizenship when promoting military participation. As Wood notes, "Conditioned before the war to accept military service as a duty of citizenship in time of war, when the war in Europe turned into a national crusade and the CEF became a symbol of the nation-in-arms, this pre-war understanding of a citizen's duty became one of the foundations of conscription in 1917" (p. 212). Up to 1917, Canada's "home defence orientation" was associated with the "citizen soldier ideal" (p. 1). After conscription, the long-serving prewar militiaman was overshadowed by the notion of the innately talented civilian going straight from civvy-street to the battlefield with a modicum of training.

While a host of newspapers and journals are listed in the bibliography, the main source of analysis is the *Canadian Military Gazette.* This was the only military journal to continue publication for the period studied. The journal was self-proclaimedly nonpartisan and reprinted articles on military themes from across the country. As with any discursive study of a print source, ascertaining the extent to which views expressed in the journal were read and accepted by Canadians is problematic. Wood notes that hundreds of men may have read a single copy in the mess, but it may be equally true that copies moldered without ever being read. That the journal was quoted by newspapers across the country is a good indicator that its columns carried some weight, as are frequent references in the *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (pp. 14-16).

In addressing the historiography of the ideas surrounding the Canadian militia, Wood grapples with both historical heavyweights and a new breed of contenders. Carl Berger's classic work on imperialist thought in Canada, *A Sense of Power* (1971), posited that Canadian nationalism was heavily influenced by, and compatible with, imperial ties to Britain. Wood challenges these imperial connections when applied to the militia, suggesting that, "the indigenous citizen soldier traditions of the country" were highly influential in forming imperial notions in Canada (p. 55). Militia criticisms of the Permanent Force often hinged on the British character of the regulars, blaming them for bending to the whims of patronage (pp. 58-64). Wood notes that while military reformers couched their criticisms in rhetoric which emphasized duty to the British Empire, the specific reforms they promoted advocated home defense (p. 143). Wood is especially set against the utility of gender studies in examining the militia. For example, he considers the approach of Mark Moss's *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (2001) to be ahistorical. While Moss argues that the cadet movement was an exercise in socialization and control, fostering militarism and patriotism, Wood contends that the long-term military aims were never overshadowed by progressive social prescriptions (p.163).

The extent to which the ideas in the *Canadian Military Gazette* and those expressed in the speeches of the Canadian Defence League or various general officers commanding were shared by the general public is, of course, questionable. Wood convincingly suggests that while at the beginning of the Laurier era, the general public was little interested in military affairs, by the time of the Dreadnought crisis in 1909-10, Canadians had awakened to military demands. The degree of sophistication

of the civilian public's thoughts are challenged, however; Wood notes that "many Canadians simply enjoyed a good parade and felt, almost instinctively, that maintaining a national army was simply something that 'grown up' nations did" (p. 3).

Wood's work expands our knowledge of the Canadian militia beyond the elite imperialists and general officers commanding. By a close study of the *Canadian Military Gazette* and the speeches of militia officers and advocates, he shows the complex varieties of thought regarding the role of the citizen soldier in Canadian defense. By doing so he muddies the waters of the traditional historiography surrounding imperialism and the militia in Canada. More a history of military thought than a discursive study of popular conceptions, the work will appeal to academic military historians, while leaving gendered analysis and discourse and identity studies to the social historians.

Note

[1]. Jack L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3.

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