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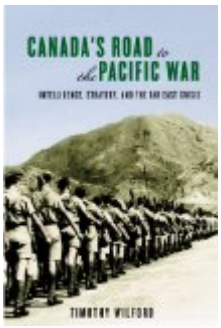

Timothy Wilford. *Canada's Road to the Pacific War: Intelligence, Strategy, and the Far East Crisis.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012. 312 pp. $94.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7748-2121-6.

Reviewed by Galen Perras

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Starting in the 1960s, a procession of writers in Canada--journalists, popular historians, and academics (including yours truly)--sought to explain the loss of two thousand Canadian troops in Hong King in December 1941 to a Japanese attack. Though a variety of reasons have been presented, one of the most common laments centers on the lack of an independent Canadian intelligence gathering apparatus that could have advised Canada's Cabinet War Committee as it made its ill-fated choice to respond favorably to Britain's September 1941 request for Canadian troops to be dispatched to Hong Kong. Timothy Wilford's book does much to answer key questions about Canada's intelligence capabilities in the Pacific theater before Japan's fateful decision to go to war with Western powers in December 1941. Wilford is particularly well qualified to make his judgments. An electrical engineer initially by training, though one with an obvious historical bent, he began and completed his PhD in history at the University of Ottawa as a mature student. This unique blend of skills enabled Wilford to do something that many historians cannot do: to assess both the analytical and technical aspects of Canadian intelligence gathering as matters unraveled in the Asia-Pacific region in the final months of 1941.

This important book does two things especially well. First, Wilford, having exhaustively consulted primary records held in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, makes clear just what Canada's intelligence systems could, and could not, do technically in 1941. Wilford properly places such Canadian technical capabilities within the broader British and American intelligence systems. Certainly, there was no lack of information coming in to Allied analysts in those critical last months of peace in the Pacific. But as Roberta Wohlstetter noted as far back as 1962, American code-breakers and analysts, hampered by a shortage of linguists, also were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of material, most of it not useful, that crossed their desks. Canada faced the very same problems despite the assistance of the

noted, and perhaps infamous, American cryptographer, Herbert Yardley.

Second, Wilford also links frontline intelligence gathering and its analysis with Canadian decision making at the highest levels when it came to the decisions by the Canadian government to reinforce Hong Kong and then to "evacuate" over twenty-two thousand Japanese Canadians from Canada's West Coast in early 1942. Despite concerns among Canadian military officials--notably, a former British intelligence officer with much experience in Asia, Colonel B. R. Mullaly--that Hong Kong was in a very vulnerable defensive position and likely could not be rescued, Canada opted to buttress Hong Kong because it believed its small effort, when combined with much larger American and British reinforcements, would help to deter war. As for the Japanese Canadian evacuation, building on earlier and valid assertions by J. L. Granatstein and Gregory Johnson that fears of espionage, at least in part, drove the prime minister, W. L. M. King, to authorize the controversial removal orders, Wilford shows that there was convincing evidence, gathered by wireless interception, that Japan's diplomats and military officers had sought to use Japanese Canadians living in British Columbia to gather information. While Wilford--like Granastein and Johnson before him--asserts that such efforts had rather little success in recruiting Japanese Canadians spies, including fishermen operating in Canadian waters, Japan's tactics certainly poisoned the well for Japanese Canadians among decision makers in Ottawa.

To conclude, this is a very important book, well researched and well argued, that any historians seeking to discuss Allied policies in the months prior to December 1941 should read and use. It is also a cautionary tale about the problems that can ensue when officials make decisions based on good but sadly incomplete data.

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