

REVIEW OF *FIELDS OF FIRE*

In the Spring 2004 issue of *Canadian Military Journal*, Terry Copp and Roman Jarymowycz responded to my review of Copp's book, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*. I wish to reply to their remarks.

Terry Copp's response does not require lengthy comment. I am, however, satisfied that he admits that "a more complete study is required" before his interesting claim – that heavy Canadian casualties in Normandy resulted not from operational or tactical failure but because Canadian formations spent more time in close combat than their British counterparts – can be validated.

Roman Jarymowycz believes that I am "irritated by Copp's rehash of Canadian battalion successes as evidence to rebut Stacey, but he fails to reveal what would satisfy him. An examination of every Canadian battalion in II Corps against their opposite numbers? A difficult but *not* impossible job."

If Jarymowycz is referring to Copp's assertion that heavy Canadian casualties resulted from more time spent in combat than British units, then the most appropriate response I can provide is found in Brian Reid's review of *Fields of Fire* which appeared in *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin* (Vol. 6 No. 3 Fall/Winter 2003): "If there is any substance to this allegation, then surely the sources indicating the number of days each division in 21 Army Group fought (particularly those days in which they were engaged in major offensive operations as opposed to holding static positions) along with its casualties should be cited, as clearly this is an explosive issue."

I can only add that, to substantiate Professor Copp's claim, a diligent historian would have to go below the divisional level, to the brigade and battalion level. I do not regard this as being a "difficult but *not* impossible job", but only a task that would require some work.

Colonel Jarymowycz writes that my "exasperation with Copp's scholarship is puzzling", and asks: "What are the exacting academic standards" that I seek? I think that my review made the weaknesses of *Fields of Fire* perfectly clear. I criticized Professor Copp for ignoring important and established scholarship, failing to provide proper context for a number of his quotes and statements, and making generalizations based on inadequate evidence. I contend that anyone with some knowledge of history will immediately recognize

the standards of scholarship by which I measured *Fields of Fire*, and why I found the book wanting.

Jarymowycz also censures me for avoiding the "tactical battlefield", presumably in Normandy, which I believe is quite unjustified. As for Normandy, I recently wrote a major piece dealing with the activities of one armoured regiment and three infantry companies over a 72-hour period in an area of about 15 square kilometres. My experience of writing at the tactical level of war extends well beyond the Normandy campaign: I am the author of three published books on individual battles, and I have edited eleven tactical studies by serving or former combat arms officers which appeared in the *Fighting for Canada* series. I well understand the perils of writing about that level of war. I certainly do not avoid the tactical battlefield, but I readily admit that it does frighten me.

Finally, Colonel Jarymowycz ends his letter by quoting a distinguished (but unidentified) military historian who cheers "for all sides and urge[s] more different perspectives." He suggests that this would have been "a far more elegant way" to have ended my review. Not surprisingly, I disagree, and my verdict on *Fields of Fire* – that of the old Scots law, "Not Proven" – remains unaltered.

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