

GENERALLY SPEAKING THE MEMOIRS OF MAJOR GENERAL RICHARD ROHMER

by Richard Rohmer

590 pp, photos, maps, appendices, index
The Dundurn Group, 2004, \$45.00

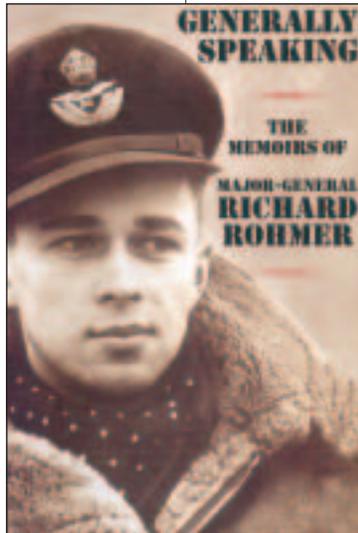
Reviewed by Colonel (ret'd) Randall Wakelam

Richard Rohmer is a well-published popular author whose works, mostly political fiction, have appeared at regular intervals over the last three decades. In addition to these publications, he has also produced professional documents and non-fiction works. But Rohmer is not just a writer. Many will know him as a veteran fighter pilot and air reservist; others will recognize him as Toronto lawyer, political organizer and ideas man, and sometime-politician. These memoirs capture all these Richard Rohmers, and more. He has produced a volume that covers an amazingly wide range of events and accomplishment, from his earliest memories to the present.

Rohmer does not, in telling his story, set out to argue any particular theme to his life. Rather, he simply tells the story of his experiences in the first person. In his reflections, we see much of what he did and we share occasionally in his opinions of events and personalities. Readers encounter an amazing range of Canadian and international personages, spanning over 60 years. Vignettes include his meeting with the likes of Patton and Rommel (the latter at a distance), his acquaintances with Canadian politicians and Governors General, and his professional and personal relationships with some of the major names in Canadian business, such as Lord Thomson of Fleet and the Reichmann brothers. Rohmer occasionally makes mention of notes upon which he bases his remembrances, but one assumes that he is largely reconstructing events from a well-honed lawyer's memory.

The strength of the volume is that it covers such a broad span of Canadian and world events, and looks at them through the eyes of a participant. But this is also the volume's weakness, for it does not explore any one facet of the author's life in sufficient detail to make the memoir of lasting value, particularly to the military professional. For instance, his treatment of fighter and photo-reconnaissance life on 430 Squadron could fill an entire volume, rather

than just 130 pages. We are left wanting more in terms of flying tactics and techniques, life in the field (yes, fighter pilots living in tents and digging slit trenches!) and the thoughts and emotions that went through his head during 135 combat operations. Similarly, Rohmer could have produced an insightful examination based on his time as Chief of Reserves. He starts to do that, describing his comings and goings within the power corridors of National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ), but never really takes the time to cover these areas in depth. The same could be said for his experiences as a post-war reserve fighter squadron pilot and commanding officer and also for most of his civilian endeavours.



Rohmer writes in a light, conversational, style that is easy to absorb, but the book sometimes lacks the richness of language that one might expect. For example, he has a penchant for the adjective 'beautiful,' which ends up badly over-used by the end of the work. Similarly, he uses many short chapters in describing isolated anecdotes or accomplishments. It might have been more illuminating had he tried to weave several of these episodes together, based on their chronology, in order to demonstrate the complexity of his life. On the plus side, the volume includes many photos, some maps, a range of primary documents from Rohmer's own papers, and an extensive index.

Most of the peacetime stories revolve around southern Ontario and Toronto, but sadly there are no maps of these environs on which one could situate the various Rohmer homes, offices and social haunts, so that it might be possible to get a better sense of his physical displacements. Fortunately, this reviewer spent most of the last decade living in the parts of Toronto that the author describes, but even I had trouble with some of his geographic references. There is a similar and more frustrating lack of maps of his time with 430 Squadron, where it would have been very useful to be able to see from where his squadron operated, and from where he conducted the missions he describes.

Finally, it must be noted that the book starts with two glaring errors, misspelling flak as 'flack' and stating that the Mustang Mark I fighter that he flew had two 30 mm guns as part of its armament, as opposed to the 30 cal. guns that

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these aircraft actually mounted. Happily there are, from what could be seen, few other errors of this sort, so readers should not be discouraged.

In sum, this is an interesting read, but one which has its limitations. Rohmer closes his memoirs indicating that he still has many windmills to tilt. One could strongly recommend that he return to writing

about his military service and fill in the gaps. In so doing, he would undoubtedly add to this nation's military historiography and awareness.

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THE RED MAN'S ON THE WARPATH: THE IMAGE OF THE "INDIAN" AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by R. Scott Sheffield

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press
232 pages, \$103.93 (hardcover) or \$36.62 (paperback)

Reviewed by Brian R. Selmeski

The *Red Man's on the Warpath* is a theoretically sophisticated, methodologically innovative and exceedingly well-written study of the English Canadians' image of the "Indian" from 1930 to 1948. The author is quick to point out that it is "not a work of Native history even though First Nations people form the subject Rather, it is an examination of an aspect of English Canada's cultural history." Nor is it military history in the traditional sense, although the period in question centres upon the Second World War. Consequently, the book may well disappoint readers searching for detailed accounts of Aboriginal martial exploits, or extensive data with respect to Native recruitment. However, those interested in war's effects on the whole of Canada's society, not just upon the military, and the cultural rather than sociological aspects of conflict, will likely delight in this work.

The book traces two distinct trends in the representation of Native Canadians, the "Public Indian" and the "Administrative Indian." To determine the extent of public discourse, Sheffield painstakingly reviewed all references to Native people from a broad sample of Canada's print media during the period in question. The approach was holistic, examining an unusually lengthy timeframe and emphasizing the contributions of non-journalists through letters to the editor, poems and cartoons. This permitted him to determine not just the dominant opinions

of the day but also the values and norms that fed and sustained these beliefs. Sheffield concludes that the public image of the "Indian" was neither unitary nor static, but shifted over time between multiple expressions. He meticulously demonstrates how an emphasis on the "noble savage," to laud Native past behaviour, and "drunken criminal," to critique their conditions during the Great Depression, gradually gave way to the "Indian-at-war" as a means to promote national unity in the dark and early days of the war, and this is from whence the title was drawn. Finally, that public image morphed into the "Indian-victim," as victory became more certain and Canadian gazes turned from winning the war in Europe to winning the peace at home.



To ascertain the nature of the "Administrative Indian" depicted by the government officials who controlled almost every aspect of Native people's lives, the author examined archival records from the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB). These ranged from school files to internal correspondence, enlistment and conscription records, to testimony before parliamentary committees. Sheffield suggests that the IAB's discourse was, on the whole, more resistant to change than that of the public on account of its construction and deployment by a relatively small troupe of long-serving officials. The image of the "Administrative Indian" was somewhat adaptable in the face of mobilization, total war and demobilization, but ultimately this image reflected those who crafted it and their desires. He concludes by noting that IAB's "raison d'être needed to be framed within an unequivocal sense of superiority," as "tampering with the pillars of racial superiority could destabilize the entire structure."

Rather than treat these discourses as "social facts," the author presents a highly nuanced treatment, never shying away from quirks, variations and ambiguities. His inclusion of these details and knack