
**Stopping the Panzers:
The Untold Story of D-Day**

by Marc Milner

Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2014

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Reviewed by Peter J. Williams

When confronted with a book's title, which includes the words, "The Untold Story," this reviewer, tends to be somewhat leery as to what lies between the covers. In this particular case, however, I was disabused

of this by a number of things. First, the author: Professor Marc Milner is one of Canada's most accomplished historians, being noted for his works on our naval history. With previous service in the Directorate of History and Heritage, he is currently serving as Director of the Milton F. Gregg, VC Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick. Second, I was fortunate to attend the book's launching at the Canadian War Museum, where the author gave a presentation on the work. This included (in his words), a resumé of what we think we "know" (this a very clever use of quotations marks by Marc) about Canada and D-Day. I, along with many in the audience, no doubt, found out that I didn't know as much as I thought I did on the subject. Third, the book was from the University Press of Kansas, a leader in the military history field. Finally, and as I usually do before buying a book,

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I checked the extent of Notes and primary sources. There were, as my Australian colleagues would say, “No worries” on that account.

What the author seeks to do in this work, and which in this reviewer’s opinion he succeeds, is to lay to rest many of the so-called myths surrounding the performance of the 3rd Canadian Division, in particular, during the Normandy landings and immediately thereafter. Although it is well known (or should be) that the 3rd Division advanced farther than any other Allied formation on the 6th of June, conventional wisdom in the minds of some holds that in the days following, the Canadian advance was stalled, and that they had been bettered by the German opposition. Not so, claims Milner, who states that by D+4 (10 June), it was the troops of the 3rd Canadian Division, battered to be sure, who were the ones holding the high ground, having stopped the panzers (three divisions worth of them, and of whose leadership Milner is critical) which would otherwise have defeated the entire Allied invasion on the beaches.

The book starts by the background to the planning of the landings, in which the 3rd Canadian Division was effectively the Allied main effort formation, with the task to stop the German counter-attack on ground which both sides had identified as vital to accomplishing this task. The bulk of the book is taken up with describing the actions of the 7th and 9th Canadian Brigades, which led 3rd Division’s advance up to 10 June. Despite being perhaps more renowned for his narratives on naval warfare, Milner proves that he is equally comfortable, and indeed, is *highly able* in describing small combat actions at brigade level and below. In fact, Milner has walked the ground of the actions he describes in the book.

Being a Gunner, I so introduced myself to the author at the signing, saying that I hoped he gave much coverage to the actions of the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) in this book. He replied, saying that there was plenty of such coverage.

Indeed there was. But not totally of the type I had expected. Professor Milner goes into great pains to describe how well endowed the 3rd Canadian Division was with fire support, more so than any other Allied division which landed that day, as would befit its role, and we can take a certain degree of pride in this. However, one element of the “untold story” was that of 14th Field Regiment RCA, which, according to Milner, only began firing in support of 8th Brigade late on the afternoon of D-Day. Although this fire (in the author’s words), “...saved the North Novas from virtual annihilation...”,¹ why the Regiment was not firing earlier puzzled me. So, I double checked the RCA official history and

found that the entries for 14th Field were rather thin, making no real reference to its guns firing, but instead, describing problems the regiment encountered as a result of enemy fire and intervening crests between the guns and potential targets, which caused “serious problems.”² This was a somewhat sobering revelation.

As to the scholarly aspects of the book, these are beyond reproach and are up to the standard one would come to expect from such an eminent author. The Notes run to some 24 pages, and the primary sources include material, not only from across Canada, but also the United States and the United Kingdom, including, interestingly, the archives of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This is all supplemented with personal accounts of combatants and access to German sources, which give details of the extent of casualties they had inflicted upon them by the Canadians. Very good maps complement the narrative at appropriate points, and there were many somewhat rare photos, including those of key personalities within the 3rd Canadian Division and of both Canadian and German troops in action. One of these was of a Lieutenant James Doohan, an officer who came ashore on the 6th of June 1944 as a member of 13th Field Regiment RCA, (in which Milner’s own father served), and who subsequently became an actor, being better known to TV audiences as Star Trek’s “Scotty.”

Stopping the Panzers should be considered as a textbook for history courses at our Royal Military College and other Canadian Armed Forces

(CAF) training units where the history of our fighting forces is taught. Certainly, every Canadian regiment (or “Regiment”) or Branch that went ashore on D-Day should have a copy in its unit library. Besides contributing to a better knowledge by future generations of our past, it will also teach them, should they have the “history bug,” that it is never too late to tell an “untold story.” Strongly recommended.

Colonel Williams *has just retired from military service, but was most recently serving as Director Arms Control Verification on the Strategic Joint Staff. He is a regular contributor to the Canadian Military Journal.*

NOTES

1. Marc Milner, *Stopping the Panzers: The Untold Story of D-Day* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2014), p. 186.
2. Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, CD, *The Gunners of Canada Volume II: The History of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, 1919-1967* (Beauceville, QC: Imprimerie Eclairer, 1972), p. 279.