

Comparative Essay
Topic B: The Normandy Balance Sheet
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HIST 226
November 23, 2014

The two pieces being that will be considered for this assignment are C.P. Stacey's *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III* and Terry Copp's article "21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet." Before formal analysis, it is good to consider the backgrounds of the authors.

C.P. Stacey joined the Canadian Signal Corps in 1924, eventually being promoted to Major in 1940 and stationed as a Historical Officer at the Canadian Military Headquarters in England.¹ He would remain stationed overseas until 1945 when he became Director of the Historical Section of the General staff, a position he would hold until 1959.² The fact he held this position while writing the piece being considered holds tremendous bearing on how we are to interpret the piece. For one, as the official historian for the military, Stacey could have been afforded better access to important documents relevant to the research needed to write his work. The fact he was also overseas during the war also gives Stacey the benefit of being able to use his firsthand account of events as he recollected them, and considering the gap between the end of the war and his writing this piece was only 15 years his memory would still be fairly fresh as to how events occurred while still allowing for a reasonable amount of reflection to occur on the impact any given event would have in the larger picture of the war. However, Stacey's involvement with the military could also colour his work if he felt a sense of obligation to paint the Canadian Military in a positive light (or perhaps even faced internal pressure to do so), especially as they were his current employer while researching and writing the work.

Terry Copp is currently a Professor Emeritus at Wilfrid Laurier University and the director for the Laurier Centre for Military and Strategic Disarmament Studies.³ Copp states in the introduction to his article that until his association with Robert Vogel he had little historical knowledge regarding the

1 Directorate of History and Heritage, "Biography – C.P. Stacey," *DHH – Biography – C.P. Stacey*, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/adh-sdh/bio/index-eng.asp>, November 15, 2014

2 Directorate of History and Heritage, "Biography – C.P. Stacey."

3 Wilfrid Laurier University, "Prof. Terry Copp," *Wilfrid Laurier University – Faculty of Arts – Faculty/Staff Listing – Terry Copp*, http://legacy.wlu.ca/homepage.php?grp_id=552&ct_id=422&f_id=35, November 15, 2014

military.⁴ His research focus eventually became examining primary sources from the divisional, brigade, and battalion levels, a focus that he continues today evinced by his stated commitment to writing a book on 21 Army Group that deals with the subject.⁵ Copp has also supplemented his research with battlefield tours of Normandy, an experience that helped shaped his views on the operations that took place in Normandy.⁶ One advantage Copp potentially has over Stacey is his perceived academic freedom, not having to answer to the Canadian military for any of his views. Copp also has the benefit that with the passage of time more and more documents would have been declassified and readily available to aid his research, however it should be noted that this doesn't necessarily imply the same unfettered access Stacey could have enjoyed. It is also worth noting that unlike Stacey, the passage of time may have hurt Copp. This could manifest itself in instances where Copp uses a personal recollection from a veteran as the passage of time would have been significant enough to possibly colour the memories and distort historical fact.

One difference in the opinions of Stacey and Copp is the role air power played in the Normandy campaign. This is visible early in Copp's piece where he states "It was evident air power, strategic or tactical, had not been the decisive factor in Normandy or elsewhere,"⁷ a rather non-traditional view on the matter. Copp does not go into great detail about this, although he does state he came to this conclusion as part of a larger conclusion he reached in the 90's.⁸ This is important as Copp wrote multiple books, papers, and articles over the time period between this conclusion and the article being examined, leading one to wonder if he was assuming the reader would have a familiarity with his reasoning via his other works.

Stacey, while not talking exhaustively about air power, does manage to place a certain

4 Terry, Copp, "21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet," *Canadian Military History*. Volume 16, Number 1 (Winter 2007), 65

5 Wilfrid Laurier University, "Prof. Terry Copp."

6 Copp, "21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet," 65

7 Copp, "21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet," 65

8 Copp, "21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet," 65

importance on it by mentioning it as part of a larger strategic superiority the Allies had in the war. One source he uses to justify this is a report from 21st S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment. It is important to note, as Stacey did, that at the time of the report this regiment had little if any contact with Canadian soldiers,⁹ however Stacey clearly felt this report was a microcosm of the entire allied war effort and what other German regiments would have experienced. Stacey makes a point of highlighting how much emphasis the German report put on allied air superiority, including a direct quotation where the Germans stated “All marching motion must cease completely,”¹⁰ whenever an allied aircraft appeared. This also serves to emphasize a point Stacey makes earlier when he briefly mentioned the Allies enjoyed almost undisputed air superiority because of the little air support the Germans were offered.¹¹

As Stacey is discussing the report from 21st S.S. Panzer one similarity does arise between his and Copp's respective views, the effective bombardment of the Germans. Copp cites the fact that about a third of the Allied manpower was devoted to the artillery during the battle for Normandy¹² and goes on to further state that the artillery strikes “had to be delivered to the right places at the right times...The gunner's war deserves much more attention than it has received.”¹³ As mentioned, Stacey comes across this point in the 21st S.S. Panzer report stating they had “a healthy respect for the Allies' artillery, 'the main arm' of their 'attrition and annihilation tactics.’”¹⁴ However, Stacey does also make an earlier mention that some of the credit for this bombardment should also go to the naval forces the Allies had placed in the area as well as air units that were brought into play against the German ground forces.¹⁵

9 C.P., Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960), 274.

10 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 274.

11 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 271.

12 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 66

13 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 66

14 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 274.

15 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army*

While both authors attribute effective bombardment as a decisive factor, it is worth noting that they see this as a consequence of a much more decisive factor, superior battlefield strategy developed by those in command. However, who this command was differs depending on which author you are to believe. For Stacey the leadership of Montgomery was unquestionably the greatest part of this strategy using words such as “firm and effective”¹⁶ to describe his handling of the operation. He does acknowledge there is controversy over Montgomery's true role in the Normandy campaign, but he blames this on “national as well as personal susceptibilities.”¹⁷ This is in sharp contrast to how he views the leadership on the battlefield. Stacey cites an earlier comment of his where he states the Canadian Army was disadvantaged because they “[possessed] a proportion of regimental officers whose attitude towards training was casual and haphazard..”¹⁸ and, even after lionizing the efforts of Canadian soldiers and officers, goes on to further state “There still remained [officers]...whose inadequacy appeared in action...”¹⁹ Stacey further justifies this argument by noting times there were command changes within the Canadian brigades and seems to excuse the idea that lack of experience was a deciding factor since some of the German regiments also suffered from the same problem and again, seems to point Canadian difficulties back to what he perceived to be a relaxed attitude while training.²⁰

Copp takes a much different approach, noting that Montgomery's plan “proved to have little operational significance except that it focused attention on Brittany,”²¹ a remark that almost seems to

in the Second World War Volume III, 271.

16 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 273.

17 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 272.

18 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 275.

19 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 275.

20 Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III*, 277.

21 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 66

snidely dismiss Montgomery's role in the larger picture of what happened during the Normandy campaign. Copp also seems to take an indirect shot at views that ground level commanders had failed, similar to those held by Stacey, as he states at length

Men in combat continually engage in cost benefit analysis. Orders are ignored, amended or renegotiated as decision-makers engage in calculations of risk versus gain. This reality offends senior commanders whose plans are not carried out and military historians who seem to believe that actions that do not go as planned “fail.” But the primary responsibility of the commander is to advance the goal of winning the war while the historian’s job is to explain what happened, not to issue pass/fail grades.²²

Copp gives an example of this earlier in his article, addressing one of the times a commander had to be replaced, implying that the unit's placement within the larger strategic picture of Normandy and unit morale were bigger factors than the perceived failure of the commander, mentioning “Few [veterans] accepted the idea that [their commander] had failed...but there was agreement that...being given an operational level task...had a powerful effect on morale.”²³ Copp also contrasts Stacey by stating the training of units was not an issue speaking at length of how army doctrine allowed the unit commanders a great deal of flexibility in dealing with how to deal with Germans in battle, seeming to emphasize his earlier point of assigning pass/fail grades since objectives could thus be achieved in numerous manners, not just through the commands given, and also stating that “The Anglo-Canadian army ...was well prepared for the kind of warfare they encountered.”²⁴

Overall, both Copp and Stacey have a variety of strengths and weaknesses to their viewpoints. Copp and his emphasis on divisional level operations is a fresh and his emphasis on the actual series of events rather than assigning pass/fail grades is helpful when examining the larger picture. This is

22 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 72

23 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 70

24 Copp, “21st Army Group in Normandy: Towards a New Balance Sheet,” 69

seemingly strengthened greatly by his use of personal anecdotes from veterans, however there is always the possibility that these veterans could be painting a rosier picture of their units than necessary out of devotion, attempting to lionize their efforts and refusing to accept any notion there were failures on the battlefield. Copp's refusal to address the question of air power is also problematic as there is little doubt the allies enjoyed superiority of the air and could use air forces in a strategic manner against German forces.

Stacey's strength is his use of enemy accounts after encountering Allies in battle, a source that would not be as forgiving to Allied strategies and tactical efforts, but his weakness lies in his unabashed loyalty to Montgomery and his ignorance of why divisional officers may have reacted the way they did given battle situations, focusing on their perceived failures rather than their effectiveness.

All things considered, Copp's piece seems to have a more persuasive effect as he addresses traditional critiques of the Normandy campaign well and his use of first-hand sources, while we can question their motives, corroborate each other well enough and offer a fresh perspective that impersonal reports to commanders would offer. Copp also benefits from Stacey's immense loyalty to Montgomery and his methods, a loyalty that upon reflection, can seem to colour many of his points regarding the events of the battle.

Bibliography

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