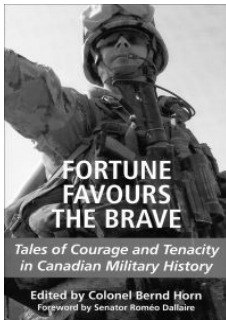


**Published in the Nova Scotian, Halifax Sunday Herald on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2009**

## **Required reading for Canadians**

Book shows how dramatically 'peacekeeping' mission has changed  
By John Boileau



Fortune Favours the Brave: Tales of Courage and Tenacity in Canadian Military History edited by Col. Bernd Horn (Dundurn, 48 pages, \$35)



Canadian Master Cpl. Scott Vernelli, right, of November Company 3rd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment and another unidentified soldier set up a defensive position during an assault on a Taliban command centre in Afghanistan. (Murray Brewster / CP)

In *Fortune Favours the Brave*, editor Bernd Horn, a serving infantry officer, sets out to show Canadians that this country's current mission in Afghanistan is not an aberration. Rather it is fully in line with our military history, while peacekeeping is, in fact, the anomaly.

The book's 12 chapters are each written by an established professional military historian, including four by Horn himself, who has authored, co-authored, edited or co-edited more than 25 books. Each chapter covers a particular battle, ranging from the Seven Year's War to Afghanistan today.

The stories are ably told. While a few of the battles would be familiar to many Nova Scotians, several of them might be recognized only by military history buffs. About half of them would be known only to a dedicated few.

In the first group are battles such as the second capture of Louisbourg in 1758 and 1951's Battle of Kap'yong in Korea, both of which have been written about on numerous occasions. Despite this retelling, these two battles are well covered and various new facts and figures are revealed.

The second group covers the capture of Fort Niagara during the War of 1812, the struggle for Mount

Sorrel during the First World War, the parachute jump across the Rhine River in the Second World War and the fight for "Little Gibraltar" during the Korean War. These four battles amply illustrate the book's title and are excellent examples of how boldly seizing the initiative can lead to success.

The final group—the largest and the most obscure — concerns a minor encounter during the Seven Year's War, a First World War trench raid, submarine patrols during the Cold War, the fight for the Medak Pocket in the Balkans and two stories from the present conflict in Afghanistan; the operations at Panjwayi and Arghandab.

Although Horn has used this formula before (in last year's *Show No Fear: Daring Actions in Canadian Military History*), most of these operations and battles deserve to be better known by more Canadians. Horn earns top marks for bringing these stories to the attention of the Canadian public, a public that far too frequently has tended to view Canada's military past through the rose-coloured glasses of peacekeeping. In fact, the traditional vision of lightly-armed blue berets interposing themselves between belligerents has been out of place for more than 15 years. It died in the Balkans in the early 1990s.

While separately the stories make excellent reading, a couple of them do not belong in this book. Two of the battles — Louisbourg from the Seven Year's War and Fort Niagara from the War of 1812 — entailed few, if any, Canadians. It is difficult to claim that Canadians are fierce fighters (as former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice once did), when the examples that are used do not involve Canadian soldiers.

The second drawback in the book is a lack of balance, both by war and by service. There are two battles from each of the Seven Year's War, the First World War, the Korean Conflict and Afghanistan, while the War of 1812, the Second World War, the Cold War and the Balkans rate one each. By service, all but one of the chapters is about army battles; it concerns the navy.

While any battles chosen to illustrate Horn's thesis must of necessity be subjective, eliminating two of the pre-Confederation battles would have provided an opportunity to include chapters on the navy and air force from the Second World War. The history of these services during that conflict provides exceptional examples of Canadian courage and tenacity and their exclusion makes little sense.

Despite any differences of opinion I might have with the editor over his choice of wars and battles, the individual stories are highly recommended for military enthusiasts and the general public alike. In particular, the last three chapters on operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan should be required reading for all Canadians, to show them how dramatically United Nations missions have changed within the last 20 years.

*Author and historian John Boileau served in the Canadian army for 37 years.*