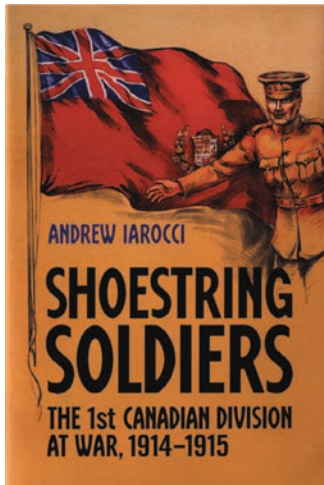


SHOESTRING SOLDIERS: THE 1ST CANADIAN DIVISION AT WAR

IAROCCHI, Andrew. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, hardcover, 362 pages, \$31.50, ISBN: 978-0802098221

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Scholarship devoted to Canadian participation in the First World War continues to expand thanks to the arrival of a new generation of academics devoted to widening the study of this conflict. In the last two years alone a number of books examining various aspects of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) have appeared, including several studies of army formations and units that fought on the western front.

In *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War*, historian Andrew Iarocci draws on the tremendous wealth of primary sources available to historians of the Canadian Corps, as well as many more recent publications, to produce a very astute and detailed operational analysis of the first several battles fought by Canadians in the Great War. Divided into ten chapters as well as a number of appendices, the main thesis of the book takes issue with the popular myth that the 1st Canadian Division was largely an amateur formation that only survived its first year of combat due to luck and raw courage instead of skill. Iarocci adopts a revisionist approach to these earlier official interpretations of the 1st Canadian Division, and openly challenges earlier official histories produced by Duguid in 1938, and Nicholson in 1964.

Iarocci does a good job of dispelling many of the traditional perceptions that have characterized the initial combat effectiveness of the Canadian Corps for far too long. He often points to the fact that it was not a lack pre-war professionalism and pre-deployment training that led to difficulties on the battlefield, but rather the constant lack of material resources, especially artillery support and small arms ammunition. In his analysis of the Second Battle of Ypres, Iarocci details several occasions where Canadian artillery runs short, or where units get captured only after losing all of their machine guns or running out of ammunition. From his examination of the divisional ammunition columns, Iarocci is able to demonstrate convincingly that the 1st Canadian Division performed as well as could be expected given their material restrictions.

With its focus on delivering up to date narratives of the Second Battle of Ypres, Festubert, Givenchy, as well as the less well-known Trench battles along the Ploegsteert-Messines front occurring later that year, the book gives less attention to other issues. Iarocci only briefly addresses the subject of gas warfare in his book, probably because the topic has already received considerable attention by other authors. Where he does seem to struggle is the issue of command and control. In an effort to always portray the division in a positive light, Iarocci is at times too sympathetic towards his subjects. Still, this empathy does not detract from the overall value of the analysis, and readers looking for a different assessment of key figures are recommended to read Kenneth Radley's history of the 1st Canadian Division, *We Lead, Others Follow*.

Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of the book, and also perhaps its greatest strength, is Iarocci's acknowledgement of and attention spent on the German formations facing the 1st Canadian Division. Too many Canadian First World War studies ignore the adversary, usually because their authors take myopic approaches to the study of the Canadian Corps. Iarocci has successfully included the impact of both sides in his analysis, and he is to be commended for it. *Shoestring Soldiers* is a very well researched history, a great companion to Radley's study of the 1st Division, and a must read for scholars studying this period.