

Book Reviews

The Canadian Rangers: A Living History. By P. Whitney Lackenbauer.
Vancouver: UBC Press. xviii, 658 p.

This book is the result of a long interest by the author, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, in the Canadian Rangers. Since his time as a co-op student at the Department of National Defence to his current position as associate professor of history at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, he has continuously done research into and developed a passion for the Canadian Rangers. This history of Canada's northern "eyes and ears" brings together all that research and passion into what can be considered the authoritative work on the organization. Professor Lackenbauer's experience in Canadian military, Aboriginal, and Arctic history makes him very well-suited to write this history.

Beginning with the Pacific Coast Rangers created during the Second World War, Lackenbauer traces the history and evolution of the unit to its current incarnation as a defender of Canadian Arctic sovereignty. He describes how the Rangers expanded in the postwar period to the Arctic and other northern regions of the country. The various personalities who brought about this transformation are brought to life. And they are important personalities—Canadian Forces members, such as Major Ian Hay, ran the Rangers in their region with very little control from headquarters. It was often these middle-ranking officers who turned the unit into what it is today.

One thread that Lackenbauer brings together throughout the books is how the Rangers are much more than just a military unit. In fact he emphasizes the point that if conflict did ever break out in the Canadian Arctic, they would not be very effective soldiers. But, it is their other attributes that make them so important to the region: it is their knowledge of the region, their ability to act as first response search and rescue, and their leadership role in Aboriginal communities. The various roles the Rangers played in helping to evacuate Kashechewan and Attawapiskat in northern Ontario during the 1994 floods is explained—from patrolling the streets, monitoring flood levels, and helping people to settle in evacuation centres and to finally return home. The role the Rangers have played in these small communities of Canada's North is often indispensable.

Lackenbauer chronicles the yo-yo of interest in the unit as interest in Canada's North has ebbed and flowed over the course of the Rangers'

history. He describes how the fortunes of the unit depend on politicians' interest in the North. It took the voyage of a US Coast Guard icebreaker through the Northwest Passage to catch the Canadian government's interest in 1985.

The author is very good at situating the Rangers in the context of their time. One thing I learned from the book, and I think that not many other Canadians know, is that the Rangers extend beyond the media caricature of Inuit in red sweaters with outdated rifles—rather, the Rangers include many other First Nations, anglophones, and francophones with units in almost every province and territory.

There was one area that could have used a better in-depth explanation. Lackenbauer explains how, in the early postwar history of the Rangers, there was an interesting connection with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts. The practice of appointing top officials at HBC detachments in the North as Rangers officers, and what kind of effect this might have on recruiting, or on associating the company with the unit, was never fully explored. As he writes himself, "making HBC officials company and platoon commanders was tantamount to placing control of these military appointments in private hands." Lackenbauer never goes on to explain what result this did have, and especially how this control would have affected local communities. This is disappointing as much of his book does describe the relationship between the Rangers and the communities in which they are based. Later sections of the book also talk about the key relationship between the regular force and the Rangers. HBC posts were key parts of these small northern communities, and it would have been interesting to learn more about how association with Ranger units would affect their relationship with the local populations.

This book is a timely contribution to the study of the Canadian North. The news media continues to follow Prime Minister Stephen Harper's trips to the North, and his interest in the Rangers, closely. Only this year he went shooting with the Rangers and promised to replace their old Lee Enfield rifles. The book provides Canadians with a valuable overview of the history of the Rangers, and how they have contributed to our sovereignty in the North as well as the well-being of our communities in the region. This history of the Rangers is a history of Canada's North in the second half of the twentieth century, and to understand their development is to understand the development of the region as a whole. Lackenbauer's excellent writing makes this book accessible for all Canadians with an interest in their history as evidenced by the book's recent shortlisting for the 2014 John W. Dafoe Book Prize.

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