

REVIEW OF**GREGORY M.W. KENNEDY, *LOST IN THE CROWD: ACADIAN SOLDIERS OF CANADA'S FIRST WORLD WAR*. MONTREAL & KINGSTON: MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024.****Sarah Glassford**

Gregory M.W. Kennedy's insightful and highly readable *Lost in the Crowd* manages to do three significant things in its succinct 243 pages of text.¹ First, it brings the First World War experiences of Acadians into the spotlight; second, it demonstrates the value of a methodology for studying individual military units that is new to Canadian military history; and third, it reveals the importance of life course in shaping the recruitment, retention, and postwar reintegration of soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Kennedy focuses on the 165th (Acadian) battalion while also drawing upon the wider canvas of Acadian military participation, and in the process contributes to our understanding of the Atlantic region in wartime, attitudes toward the war held by francophones outside Quebec, and the work of the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC). Deploying the techniques of both military and social history to produce what Kennedy describes as "a more human history of the war" (30), *Lost in the Crowd* confidently asserts a place for Acadian history at the heart of long-running historiographical conversations about both the CEF and the Canadian home front.

Kennedy has organized his longitudinal study into five chronological chapters that trace the evolution of the 165th battalion from creation through training, overseas deployment, integration into the CFC, and demobilization, before finishing with a look at Acadian veterans in the first decade after the war. *Lost in the Crowd* directly engages with the works of key military historians like Desmond Morton, Tim Cook, and Lee Windsor, but also ventures into areas that others have long shied away from. Desertion, disciplinary infractions, venereal disease, medical unfitness, and mental/physical health struggles are explored in a compassionate yet clear-eyed manner, implying no disrespect for the men in question. The portrait of the 165th battalion and the CFC that emerges is richer for it.

Lost in the Crowd is also intimately Acadian and follows in the footsteps of place-based studies such as Robert Rutherford's *Hometown Horizons* (2005) and Jonathan Vance's *A Township at War* (2018). The book speaks to where and how Acadians lived and worked before, during, and after the war, and uncovers their reliance on family strategies to make the most of economic opportunities - thereby providing new insights into enlistment, desertion, and postwar employment. Since Acadians of the early 20th century were found across the Maritimes and in New England this is not an exclusively New Brunswick-focused study, but New Brunswick is very much at the core of it. *Lost in the Crowd* is therefore essential reading for anyone interested in New Brunswick's wartime history, as well as those who want to learn more about the Acadian renaissance of the late-19th and 20th centuries, or Acadian history and culture writ large.

This is also a book for those keen to understand the French-English and regional tensions that grew out of World War I and continue to shape national politics and social attitudes today. Kennedy revisits earlier scholars' attempts to calculate enlistment rates and argues that at least 5,000 Acadian volunteers joined the CEF - a figure that boosts the generally accepted total of 35,000 francophone Quebecers enlisted up to 40,000 (with francophone minorities in other provinces still uncounted). This

matters, he suggests, because enlistment rates have been politically mobilized since 1914. In fact, the book's title comes from the desire of wartime Acadian elites to have their community's contribution become more visible: instead of individual Acadians being lost from view in anglophone regiments, a distinct Acadian regiment would unify the community and make its contributions visible to others. Kennedy rightly points out, however, that no contribution, no matter how large or visible, would impress those who were determined to think poorly of French Canada. Still, revisiting enlistment rates serves as "a posthumous fact-check of the anti-French polemical discourse" (108).

Traditionally, a Canadian regimental history like this one would draw upon official military sources (e.g. attestation records, records of troop movements, official correspondence) and supplementary material such as newspaper reports to focus on "training, battles, casualty rates, and officer biographies" (9). Kennedy, however, goes further, applying the techniques of social history to an additional set of sources including personal correspondence, diaries, parish registers, and census data from 1911 and 1921 in order to apply a longitudinal analysis to the soldiers of the 165th. This methodology enables him to track the movements of individual Acadian soldiers before and after military service, in their wider familial contexts. The result is exemplary scholarship: a regimental history that addresses official military matters but that also explores the experience and impact of service for ordinary soldiers and their communities.

Combining the techniques and sources of social and military history in this way also exposes the intertwined experiences of soldiers and civilians. Chapters two and four stand out in this respect, as they touch on a variety of ongoing interactions between Acadian soldiers and the citizens of Saint John (where the 165th battalion was garrisoned during the winter of 1916–17), and later between the Acadians and French civilians in the Jura region. In Saint John members of the battalion received extensive press coverage, jointly undertook a fundraising concert with the Young Women's Patriotic Association, hosted a ball and reception at the local Knights of Columbus hall, held sporting events that drew local spectators, and were regularly entertained at the armoury with programs organized by local women's groups. Some troops made use of the services of local sex workers, and a new brothel opened near the armoury within weeks of the 165th's arrival in the city. Other soldiers gathered near the railway station to drink with locals, resulting in the occasional disciplinary infraction or run-in with the law.

One compelling theme throughout the book is the rise and fall of civilian Acadians' interest in the men of the Acadian battalion. The community rallied around the 165th as frontline-soldiers-in-the-making, but lost interest when the men ended up lumbering instead of fighting. While this is interesting within the framework of a strictly Acadian story, it also has implications for Canada's memory of the First World War. The Acadians, Black Canadians, Russian prisoners, Chinese labourers, and "various enemy aliens and conscientious objectors" (148) assigned to the CFC provided essential service behind the lines, but this was not the type of war service that made it onto war memorials, honour rolls, and stained-glass church windows. As Kennedy notes, "it appears that military authorities viewed the CFC as a logical destination for those unlikely, in their view, to make good soldiers, including members of minority groups" (148). Not only did this deny them the chance to serve at the front but it also denied them a respected and prominent place in the nation-building narrative to which frontline service and war casualties were quickly tied. In *Lost in the Crowd*, Kennedy eschews nation-building rhetoric, yet still manages to write the Acadians of the CFC (and of other regiments) firmly back into the history of Canada's First World War.

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Note

¹ *Lost in the Crowd* is the recipient of the 2024 New Brunswick Scholarly Book Award. For more information about this Award, please see <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JNBS/index>.