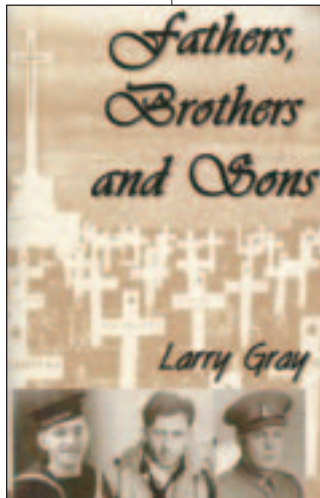


FATHERS, BROTHERS AND SONS by Larry Gray

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551 pages, \$44.99

Reviewed by Craig Leslie Mantle

The ranks of Canada's veterans have been, are now, and will continue to be in constant flux. While those from the two world wars and Korea are slowly slipping away, soon to number none at all, others from UN and NATO commitments undertaken during the last half of the 20th Century and into the early years of the 21st Century have filled the void left behind by their antecedents. Yet, veterans are only part of the larger military experience, for while these individuals survived, despite, in many cases, bearing the scars of both physical and psychological wounds, many others did not. In *Fathers, Brothers and Sons*, Larry Gray, a retired air force navigator and veterans' advocate, successfully breathes life into the names solemnly inscribed on the local war memorial in Carleton Place by tracing the personal story of each of the 46 men from this small Ontario town near Ottawa that perished during the Second World War. His earlier work, *We Are The Dead*, traces similarly the stories of those individuals from the town that were lost a generation earlier during the Great War. Taken together, these two works have added another dimension to the community's collective memory of these formative conflicts: Carleton Place's actual war memorial now has a paper companion.



The author has set before him a number of lofty and important goals. Through this lengthy book, he endeavours to interest today's youth in our nation's military past by capturing the experiences of a select handful of men. Above all else, however, he pleads passionately for every reader to be thankful for our freedoms enjoyed today, and also to never forget the sacrifices of those who served in uniform, especially those who did not return to enjoy the peace for which they fought. His zeal for his subject and the noble aims of this undertaking are truly commendable. By focusing upon the dead, he certainly provides ample opportunity for pause, and one cannot help but reflect upon the suffering of and the sacrifice endured by this small town, and, indeed, by every one like it throughout Canada at the time.

Instead of sermonizing upon the importance of remembrance and gratitude, Gray communicates his messages by providing a biographical sketch of each of the 46 individuals killed during the war. He is careful not to simply retell the soldier's, sailor's, or airman's life from birth to an early and untimely death, but, rather, to situate each individual in a broader context, incorporating regional, national, and international events. As it is presented, the dead from Carleton Place represent the broader war effort in microcosm: the army, navy, and air force are well represented, as are the various theatres of conflict, ranging from Northern Europe, to the mid-Atlantic, to Sicily

and Italy, and to South-East Asia. Although the ending of each vignette is a foregone conclusion, the synopses are all highly interesting and they offer a good read. In the end, Gray succeeds in melding the names engraved upon the town's memorial with a face and a personal, unique, and moving story.

Being a local history, a project of sorts that any community could comfortably manage, given the will and the resources, Gray's compendium unfortunately offers little for those with an academic or scholarly bent. Because he is content to relate the personal stories of those who perished (apparently drawn from their personnel files), and uses standard reference works to provide context, nothing substantially new in terms of original research or interpretation is offered. The introduction is unfortunately choppy, and, aside from his call to remember, offers no main thesis or grand argument. Since there is little synthesis of or comparison between the experiences about which he writes, the chapters are only superficially connected to one another, becoming more or less 'stand-alone stories unto themselves.' Aside from needing a good proof (some pages include numerous typographical mistakes, whereas at other points, entire paragraphs have been duplicated verbatim, one below the other), citations for contemporary documents referred to in the book are either sporadic or incomplete.

In addition, the visual images used to support the text leave much to be desired. Despite a marked lack of originality (in at least six separate instances, the same image has been used twice), others are so blurry as to be completely indecipherable, especially some of the maps, or portions thereof, that have been taken directly from G.W.L. Nicholson's official work on the Canadians in Italy. A significant number of the images have no explanatory captions, and a handful of those that are present are of questionable accuracy. All this being said, the poignant photographs that depict the individuals about whom Gray writes reinforce the sadness that must have been felt in this small community during the war years, with so many young lives being cut much too short ... and violently at that.

All in all, *Fathers, Brothers and Sons* is a good community history that is full of captivating personal stories that will appeal specifically to those with an interest in Carleton Place, or the varied units in which local men served. Genealogists, local historians, family members, and teachers will surely find this general work interesting and of great value in stimulating discussion about the war and its effects upon those everyday Canadians who put aside civilian pursuits to serve at home or abroad. The book offers another medium through which service and sacrifice can be remembered, and, hopefully, in due course, and according to Gray's wishes, it will encourage Canadians both young and old to continue to value the freedom that was bought at such a high price.

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