

Murder at the abbaye – review essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ian J. Campbell's, *Murder at the Abbaye* is the story of twenty Canadian soldiers murdered during World War Two at the Abbaye d'Ardenne in Normandy France. Campbell wrote *Murder at the Abbaye* in 1996 after a visit to Normandy sparked a personal interest in the incident. He also felt that there was a lack of publication and particularly, accurate information on the subject. Campbell felt that the brutal truth, which has been buried for over a half century, was owed to the Canadian soldiers who lost their lives there.

In reviewing this book I plan to analyze Campbell's writing and fairly review the book on a number of different levels. Writing this book was a huge project for the Campbell. Years of research on his behalf were necessary in order to write a fair and accurate book. I plan to assess the research, as well as the writing style of the author. This is Ian J. Campbell's only book and there are no reviews available for it, so I have nothing to compare my review to. I felt that the book was written with a clear precise layout, organized very well.

The most impressive part of the book was the incredible amount of research done by Campbell. Researching this topic would be very difficult due to the time period in which it took place and the fact that most of the families of the victims have been dead for a while. Campbell however managed to do a great job, with the resources that were available to him. It is this in particular that makes this a very good book. " Colonel Campbell's book is a model of its kind. Careful in research, fair in judgement, it deserves a wide readership.

His terrible subject also merits contemplation, and there are very few books of which that can be said. " 1 The book starts off by introducing each of the

twenty Canadian soldiers that are the subject of the book. Campbell provides some background information on the lives of all the soldiers, introducing and familiarizing the reader with them. He discusses the soldiers' birthplaces, age, place of employment prior to the war, family, education and relationships and touches on their decisions to enlist. The reader learns a great deal about each soldier, creating a feeling of attachment towards them.

This is an effective approach by Campbell as it creates feelings of compassion and anger with the events to come, rather than just reading about 20 faceless soldiers that the reader cannot identify with. The research that Campbell was able to gather on their lives was quite impressive. He relied primarily on war records, letters home, journals, and some interviews with remaining family. After learning about the soldiers lives individually, Campbell then goes in to how their lives intertwine and they come together to form the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

James Elgin Bolt, Ivan Lee Crowe, Walter Michael Doherty, Charles Doucette, George Vincent Gill, Thomas Haliburton Henry, Reginald Keeping, Roger Lockhead, Hugh Allen MacDonald, Joseph Frances MacIntyre, Hollis Leslie McKeil, George Richard McNaughton, George Edward Millar, Thomas Edmond Mont, Raymond Moore, James Alvin Moss, Harold George Philip, George Grenville Pollard, Frederick Williams, and Thomas Alfred Lee Windsor, who are the subject of the book, are all united under this Brigade.

The book also deals with the politics that take place in Canada that sends these Canadians as well as thousands of others overseas to fight. On June 21

1940, the Mackenzie King government enacted the National Resources Mobilization Act, requiring that every male over the age of sixteen register himself for potential service. It also went into the cooperation and battle strategy of the British, Canadian, and American governments. The responsibility of the British and Canadian divisions was to seize the city of Caen and for the more mobile American divisions to secure the Cherbourg peninsula and port.

On June 6th, 1944: D-Day, the allies, including the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, invaded the beaches of Normandy. Campbell writes in detail the experience of this day and how difficult it was on the soldiers. Thousands of men were killed before even getting off of the beach. However, most of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade survived this day and impressively managed to move forward into German occupied France, attempting to seize the city Caen. For the next several days the Canadian soldiers held there ground, with limited casualties, until June 16th.

Early that morning advancing toward Caen through a farmer's field, a soldier tripped a mine and they were under fire immediately. It lasted for several hours and finally, some wounded and all out of ammunition the Canadians were captured by the Germans 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, under command of SS troop Kurt Meyer. They were taken as prisoners to the Abbaye d'Ardenne, a church that that particular regiment occupied. The Canadian soldiers were interrogated, striped of any valuables and then executed one at a time, under order from Meyer.

The book then goes into the reaction of the soldiers' families when they learn that their loved ones are missing in action, as reported by the Canadian army. The families struggle to gain information on the whereabouts of their sons for months to come. In December 1944, after the war had ended, a boy playing outside his house near the Abbaye d'Ardenne found a bone that appeared human. The bodies of six Canadian soldiers were unearthed. In the months to come, 4 other graves were discovered near the original, and in total 19 bodies of Canadian soldiers were found.

This launched an investigation, because the Canadians were thought to be missing in action or Prisoners of War, and now they were found dead. The body of George Gerald Pollard was never found, even to this day, but it is presumed that he was murdered as well. The Canadian War Crimes Investigation Unit built a strong case against Meyer, and he was found guilty and sentenced to death by being shot; however his punishment was later changed to life-imprisonment in a Canadian penitentiary.

Meyer served a few years in a Canadian jail before being extradited, by request of Germany. Meyer's trial underwent investigation and it was decided that his sentence should be reduced to 14 years. He was released from prison early, on September 7th, 1954. Ian J. Campbell sources this book very carefully and thoroughly. Almost every page contains several lines of footnotes, often more, explaining the situation in greater detail and where the information came from.

Most of his sources come from proceedings of the trial, and family interviews. In the acknowledgments section of the book, Campbell admits

that there are probably some errors in the book due to the nature of the topic, however he assures the reader it is accurate to the best of his knowledge and any errors are minor in detail. It is obvious that he is very careful with the information he provided and he is confident in his researching skills and therefore knowledge on the topic.

Campbell writes *Murder at the Abbaye* in a chronological order easy to follow and very well organized. For the most part the book is very well written. A few sections of the book were dragged out longer than perhaps necessary and it became tiresome reading the very in depth details of the people, places and military strategies of the time. Due to the interesting nature of the topic, the difficult parts of the book are few and far between, as most of the book is well written, and interesting to read.

Ian J. Campbell's book, *Murder at the Abbaye*, is truly the first of its kind. This book puts an end to the rumours and lies that were believed before its publication. Campbell wrote a well-written, fair and accurate book, and it was not easy in doing so. This project took years of research and interviews on his behalf, in order to finally tell the story as it happened. It is obvious by the quality of his research and work put in by Campbell that he took a great deal of pride in writing this book.

The book is filled with letters sent home by soldiers and letters they received, all of which must have taken a great deal of time and effort in tracking down and locating the family members of the victims. Campbell writes this book out of respect for those Canadian soldiers who were murdered as he felt that the entire truth must be told once and for all.

Because of this, this book should be read by more than just historians, rather, all Canadians in general. The brilliant research and interesting story come together in a very well written, Murder at the Abbaye.