



## Broadcast from the Front: Canadian Radio Overseas in the Second World War by A.E. Powley: Reviewed by John Anderson

This is a remarkable book that unfortunately failed to make much of an impact when it was first published in 1975. And now that we are starting to better appreciate and recall our military history, it is long out of print. As the preface points out, this is a story from the remote antiquity of broadcasting, when state-of-the-art was a record of three-minutes duration cut on a spring-wound machine, and when the recording and transmission of the sound of an artillery barrage or a falling bomb was considered a wonder. But the heart of this book is the transcriptions of "broadcasts from the front" by some of the legends of Canadian broadcasting. They describe, for example, the courage and stoicism of Londoners during "The Blitz"; the tragedy of Dieppe; the optimism of the Canadian landings in Sicily, followed by the horrors of the battle for Ortona (described as "a mini-Stalingrad"); the D-Day landings, followed by the desperate battles in Normandy; being in London waiting helplessly for V-1 and V-2 strikes; the horrors of the battles in the Scheldt Estuary; the liberation of The Netherlands, and then the advance into northwest Germany and the sickening discovery of German concentration camps. The climax of this book is the last chapter, fittingly entitled "The Last Day". While the news of the German surrender gave rise to wild celebrations on "civvy street", the prevailing sentiment in the frontline combat units, reflected in the CBC reporting, was only overwhelming relief, coupled with sorrow and remembrance for comrades who had not lived to see the end. The episode recorded in the last paragraph of the book is, I think, particularly significant. Shortly after VE-Day, Matthew Halton quoted from John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and then enjoined Canadians to "take up the torch" not only in remembrance of "Flanders Fields" but also in remembrance of the equally appalling and life-changing battles of World War II, in Italy, Normandy, Belgium, Holland and Germany. I am too young to have first-hand memories of World War II, but the eye-witness accounts in this book bring an immediacy and freshness to many of the incidents that we now recall only

from history. And I would like to think that reading this book might help us, as Matthew Halton put it, "Remember these names, Canada, because they are written on your heart." It is fitting, I think, to bring this review forward in time for Remembrance Day. I commend this book to you.