

Soldiers for Sale: German "Mercenaries" with the British in Canada during the American Revolution (1776-83)

Jean-Pierre Wilhelmy

Baraka Books (March 2012)

Softcover \$29.95 (293pp)

978-1-926824-12-3

It may still be largely true that Canada is so very near at hand yet so very far away in our understanding. But in *Soldiers for Sale*, Jean-Pierre Wilhelmy opens a wide window on an historically and culturally significant episode in Canadian-American relations that should be of interest to folks on both sides of the border.

The author explains that after the British defeated the French in 1760, thus gaining control of the upper reaches of North America, the American colonists no longer were threatened by invasion from the North. But, as King George III was hugely in debt, he turned to the colonists to help pay for the war he viewed as fought largely for their benefit. The colonists, unsurprisingly, balked at paying higher taxes and, eventually, the American Revolutionary War began.

At the war's beginning, George III, German by heritage, found himself short of troops, having barely 8,500 soldiers in the colonies. Recruiting young men in England to fight their cousins overseas was not going well, so the king turned to his German relatives to supply "mercenaries," or hired troops. Ultimately, about thirty thousand hired German troops were brought to Canada to fight alongside the British. Two or three thousand of those settled in North America after the War.

Wilhelmy explains that it was easy for the German soldiers to marry French-speaking women in Canada, citing that, "many of the mercenaries were from the Rhine region or Alsace and spoke French, while many others came from French-speaking countries—France, Switzerland or Belgium." But the main reason for these marriages was an older story: "the billeting of German soldiers in the homes of the *habitants*."

The depth of Wilhelm's research is outstanding. In addition to extensive footnotes at the end of each chapter, his eight appendices cover topics such as the organization of each German military corps serving in Canada from 1776 to 1783, with names and titles of their commanders; a general description and drawings of German military uniforms; and the names of German soldiers who remained in Canada, listing their main quarters during the war. Also included are numerous maps showing the locations of military campaigns in which German troops fought and charts of the various regiments, including troop levels by month during the years of the war. The book finishes with a nearly twenty-page bibliography (with supplementary notes). As a jumping off place for further research and reading, *Soldiers for Sale* is a gem.

First published in French, the book contains brief prefaces by Virginia Easley DeMarce, PhD, past president of the National Genealogical Society, and by Wilhelmy's mentor, the late Marcel Trudel, professor emeritus of history at the University of Ottawa. Students of the American Revolution, Canada, or warfare in general, plus inquisitive casual readers, will all find *Soldiers for Sale* a fine investment of their time. Jean-Pierre Wilhelmy is also the author of three books of historical fiction written in French.

JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (Spring 2012)

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