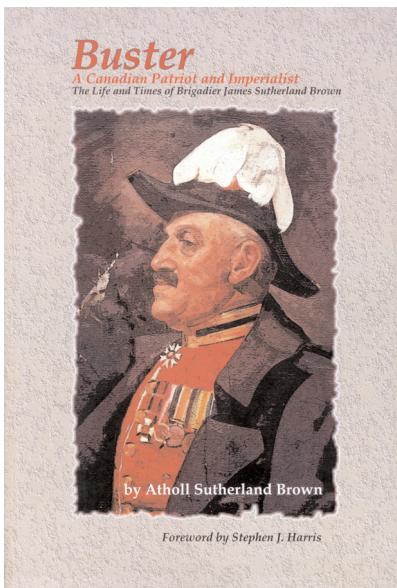

BUSTER: A CANADIAN PATRIOT AND IMPERIALIST THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BRIGADIER JAMES SUTHERLAND BROWN

By Atholl Sutherland Brown (Vancouver: Trafford Books, 2005) SC, 240 pages, ISBN 1-4120-2522-2.

Reviewed by Major J.D. Godefroy, CD

Atholl Sutherland Brown sets out in this book to write a biography of his father, Canadian Army Brigadier James Sutherland “Buster” Brown, that examines the life of the latter in the perspective of the times in which he served. Brown acknowledges that



much has already been written about Buster, most of it critical, and he candidly admits that the added value he brings to this study lies mainly in his personal recollections and knowledge of the man. Buster Brown gained infamy after his death as the author of "Defence Scheme No. 1," drafted in late 1920 and early 1921. This document laid out a defensive plan that called for a pre-emptive Canadian attack on the United States in the event of looming conflict. Buster Brown prepared this document in his role as Director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMO & I) at National Defence Headquarters at the behest of his superiors, and it is arguably typical of military plans, prepared for a possible worst case, and admittedly unlikely to be used. This said, his ardent defence of its content, particularly the military personnel and materiel requirements that it entailed, has caused him to be personally associated with it.

Brown appreciates that he is walking over familiar ground in his re-examination of the "Defence Scheme No. 1" controversy, and seeks to provide a broader insight into his father's personality. Brown takes an approach to his task that is sensitive, reasoned and sympathetic. He admits his father's flaws, and doesn't seek to gloss over them. Indeed, he devotes much of the work to providing some context for the development of Buster Brown's views and personality. We are presented a description of Buster which reveals him to be a man who was strong-willed, sometimes naïve, possessed of a distinct sense of justice and right, and unafraid to state his views. The details Atholl Sutherland Brown provides about his father's early years and subsequent Permanent Force career offer a wealth of insight into the formation of the latter's personality, and provide a window into the workings of the establishment at the time. Roughly half of the book is devoted to the career of Buster Brown before his accession to the DMO & I post in 1919, with the remainder devoted to his escalating conflicts with General Andrew McNaughton, which ultimately led to Brown's resignation from the Army in 1933.

The rivalry between Brown and McNaughton seems to have begun in 1919, when they were each being considered for post-war positions in the Permanent Force. McNaughton came out on top, with Buster given the position of DMO & I. Their disputes began over "Defence Scheme No. 1," and stemmed from the force structure and establishment assumptions that were used to build the scheme. Atholl Sutherland Brown agrees with Canadian Brass author Stephen Harris's analysis, which suggests that Brown's stand on the issue was principled, and strove to force the government to take responsibility for the defence of Canada. McNaughton is criticized less for his pragmatism than for his vindictiveness, and Buster is described as the principled foil to more "political" colleagues who ultimately drove him out of the Army he loved. Some of Brown's criticism of McNaughton is very personal, and may be motivated by his loyalty to his father; it is occasionally difficult to discern where the opinions of Buster

end, and those of his son begin. This said, Brown is generally measured in his presentation of his father's case, acknowledges his bias where appropriate, and tries to offer supporting sources or opinions where available. The portrait of Buster that emerges is one of a man who was less politically savvy than his peers, and who learned, to his chagrin, that hard work, principled objections and indignation would not triumph over political expediency. Atholl Sutherland Brown presents his father as a tragic but heroic figure, loved by his men, his subordinate officers and his peers, but a thorn in the side of those who expected him to loyally execute instructions that affronted his sense of justice.

Atholl Sutherland Brown's book does suffer from some editing flaws; occasional typographic errors or repeated spelling mistakes detract, as do errors in unit names. The Royal Canadian Dragoons become the Canadian Dragoons at least once, and Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) battalions are confused with numbered pre-war militia battalions. Some stories or comments are repeated in the text, particularly criticism of past writings on Buster, and the result is an occasional sense that you have lost your place in the book. Atholl Sutherland Brown is candid in his admission that no one who knew his father is still alive to be interviewed, and that a major source of possible insight, his father's diaries, were destroyed by his mother years ago. Nonetheless, the overall presentation of the book is sound, footnotes offer explicit references, and primary source material, particularly the Sutherland Brown Papers at Queen's University, provide the basis for the treatment. This source material, interpreted by someone with access to a wealth of family photos and first-hand information on the subject, make the book a significant and welcome addition to the published record of Canada's Permanent Force, and I recommend it with few reservations to any student of Canadian generalship.