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J. MACKAY HITSMAN FONDS

R3169

Finding Aid No. 2206 / Instrument de recherche no 2206

Prepared in 2000 by Robert Fisher of the Social and
Cultural Archives

Préparé en 2000 par Robert Fisher des Archives sociales
et culturelles

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INVENTORY ENTRY

J. Mackay Hitsman fonds**Biographical Sketch**

John Mackay Hitsman was born 19 April 1917 in Kingston, Ontario, the son of Samuel Hitsman and Minnie Mackay. He studied at Queen's University receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1939 and his Master of Arts in 1940. His Master's thesis, titled Canadian Naval Policy, was the first thesis written on Canadian naval history. He received his PhD in history from the University of Ottawa in 1964. While at Queen's University, "Mac" Hitsman was a member of the Canadian Officer Training Corps and in April 1941 he was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Artillery. He transferred to the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps in 1942 and went overseas to England in August 1943. During this period he had begun to show signs of the progressive debilitating physical condition that ultimately caused his early death. Deemed unfit for active combat, he was posted to Canadian Military Headquarters in London in October 1943 for service with the Army Historical Section under C.P. Stacey. Promoted to captain in September 1944, Hitsman remained in the Army until his deteriorating health forced his discharge in 1947. At that time, he joined the Army Historical Section, later the Directorate of History, as a civilian historian where he remained until shortly before his death in 1970.

In spite of his difficulty walking or standing, Hitsman was a prolific historian who contributed to the official history of the Canadian Army in the Second World War while writing his own articles and books on Canadian military history. The latter included *Military Inspection Services in Canada, 1855-1950* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), and *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), based on his PhD thesis. *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), co-authored with J.L. Granatstein, was published posthumously. It was reprinted in 1985 by Copp Clark Pitman while *The Incredible War of 1812* was reprinted in 1999 by Robin Brass Studio. Hitsman died in Ottawa on 11 February 1970. He married Helen Catherine Munro in 1953 and had three stepsons.

Scope and Content

The fonds consists of the personal correspondence and historical writings of J. Mackay Hitsman. The personal correspondence (vol. 1) is primarily letters written to his friends, noted historians Gerald S. Graham and James B. Conacher. They discuss his professional career, colleagues at the Directorate of History, news and gossip of the historical community, personal and family life, and the effects of his debilitating physical condition. They are particularly revealing about scholarship in the field of military history and personalities at the Canadian Army Historical Section and the Directorate of History in the 1950s and 1960s, including figures like C.P. Stacey, Courtney Bond, Murray Hunter, George Stanley and others. In addition, there are letters from friends and colleagues to his stepson Rev. Anthony Hitsman with personal reminiscences of “Mac” Hitsman for a proposed biography. The writings (vols. 2-3) consist primarily of photocopies and offprints of his articles on military history in journals and magazines such as the Canadian Historical Review, Canadian Army Journal, Military Affairs, Saturday Night, and Ontario History. There is also a copy of his master’s thesis on Canadian Naval Policy for Queen’s University (1940), reviews of books by other historians, reviews of his own books, and bound issues of the Queen’s University Journal for which he was sports editor in 1938 and 1939. Finally, there is a small amount of biographical material including obituaries and his military service record.

J. MACKAY HITSMAN

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Vol.	File	File Title	Date
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PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

1	1	Correspondence - James B. Conacher	1946-1966, 1986
1	2	Correspondence - Gerald S. Graham	1953-1970, 1987
1	3	Correspondence to Reverend Anthony Hitsman - Reminiscences of J. Mackay Hitsman by friends and colleagues	1986-1988, 1994
1	4	Notes on Interviews re. J. Mackay Hitsman - C.P. Stacey and J.L. Granatstein	[1986]
1	5	Correspondence - <i>The New Yorker</i>	1956

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

2	1	Biographical Material and Obituaries	1970, 1974
2	2	Personnel Record - Military Service and Civilian Employment (National Defence)	1986

MILITARY HISTORY MATERIAL

Vol.	File	File Title	Date
2	3	Bibliography of John Mackay Hitsman Articles	1986
2	4	J. Mackay Hitsman, "The Road to Corunna", <i>Yarns</i> (October 1941) vol. 1, no. 5	1941
2	5	Military History Articles - Photocopies	1952-1954
2	6	Military History Articles - Photocopies	1958-1959
2	7	Military History Articles - Photocopies and Offprints	1960-1967
2	8	Book Reviews by J. Mackay Hitsman in <i>Canadian Historical Review</i>	1951-1957
2	9	Book Reviews of <i>The Incredible War of 1812, Safeguarding Canada</i> and <i>Broken Promises</i>	1965-1977
2	10	Directorate of History - Research Papers and Historical Notes	1955-1968
2	11	Queen's University - Master's Thesis - <i>Canadian Naval Policy</i>	1940
3	1	J. Mackay Hitsman, "Our Young Navy", <i>Saturday Night</i> (28 September 1940) and "Canadian Unpreparedness is Nothing Unusual", <i>Saturday Night</i> (9 November 1940)	1940
3	2	<i>Queen's University Journal</i> (4 October 1938-21 March 1939)	1938-1939