

Book Review Murray Peden, **A Thousand Shall Fall**, Stoddart, 1988 (paperback), 490 pg.

By Gerry Madigan,

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David Murray Peden born in Winnipeg, Manitoba on 19 October 1923, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force at the tender age of 17. Peden trained/served as a bomber pilot from 1941 to 1945. He had a very distinguished career serving in the RCAF and as an author and lawyer following the war.

His book, **A Thousand Shall Fall**, Stoddart, 1988, was rated by no less a personage, than famed Canadian Historian, C.P. Stacey as "the best book any Canadian has written about his war experiences, and one of the best books about the war that has been written anywhere."¹

Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, USAF (Ret.) also attested in the Foreword to Peden's work that "One can (not ^{sic}) read Murray Peden's book without learning of the gallant effort bomber crews made to find and destroy their assigned military targets."² And that is truly at the crux of this book, but it is much more than that.

At the heart of and underlying Peden's book is a much wider view, that of human endurance in the face of death. That was quite evident in the face of odds against anyone surviving a tour of duty. Peden describes all this in an eloquent manner, that grips the reader who is held spellbound.

Peden's story, is not only about the trivial, routine, mundane, or of the fun and laughter of daily life, of lives lived, and lives lived at the margins. But it is also the story of tremendous loss. Peden describes with pathos the lives of those who faced death in fragile aircraft doing their duty, mission by mission, sortie by sortie, never knowing if this was the end, or if they would live to serve another day. And if they lived, they faced it all over again day by day, mission by mission until either death took a hand or a tour was completed. Peden's story is an attestation of the bravery of the men and women of his day, and their penultimate sacrifice required of their duty.

Murray Peden **A Thousand Shall Fall**, Stoddart, 1988 is a fascinating read. Although long since out of publication, it is a well worth volume to seek or be on the look out for in second hand bookstores and other markets. It is an invaluable contribution to Canada's story during the Second World War and is a worthwhile addition to anyone's personal library.

¹ Stacey, C. P. "A *Thousand Shall Fall* by Murray Peden, and: *242 Squadron: The Canadian Years – Being the Story of the RAF's 'all Canadian Fighter Squadron'* by Hugh Halliday (review)." *The Canadian Historical Review*, Volume 64, Number 2, June 1983, pp. 216.

² Murray Peden, **A Thousand Shall Fall**, Stoddart, 1988 (paperback), pg. IX