

Daniel Marston

Professor of Military History, Australian National University, Canberra

Rock in an Angry Sea: The Indian Army and the Partition of the Punjab 1947

Monday, October 2nd, 2017, 3:30-6:00 pm, Leacock 232

This year marks the 70th Anniversary of the Partition of the Sub-Continent, into the independent states of India, Pakistan, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The Partition of the Punjab, in particular, saw mass migration and ethnic cleansing. Throughout complex processes of diplomatic negotiation and large-scale planning in British India and the United Kingdom, one critical element on which the success of the entire endeavour rested was the ongoing loyalty and stability of the British Indian Army. However, despite thousands of books, monographs, and articles which consider one aspect or another of this most difficult and complicated period of history for India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, the role and conduct of the Indian Army has gone largely unexamined. The Indian Army went through a period of instability that could have destroyed any military organisation. Its experience in the events surrounding Independence and Partition is unique in the annals of military history and decolonisation. No other force has had to deal with such extreme and varied pressures. The Indian Army was essentially asked to prevent, or to attempt to contain, a civil war erupting among the various ethnic and religious groups from which its own men were drawn. This talk will examine the performance of the Indian Army during the most testing period of its history and the role it played in the tumultuous events of that period. By assessing its performance across many lines of operation during this period, I will demonstrate that the Indian Army's experiences in the Second World War were central to the role it played in postwar India, and that the importance of its involvement in preventing total societal breakdown during the transfer of power has been generally overlooked or underestimated.

Daniel Marston BA MA (McGill) DPhil (Oxon.) FRHistS holds a Professorship in Military Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. He has been a Visiting Fellow, on multiple occasions, with the Leverhulme Changing Character of War Program at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on the topic of transnational military culture and how armies learn and adapt to new environments. His first book *Phoenix from the Ashes*, an in-depth assessment of how the British/Indian Army turned defeat into victory in the Burma campaign of the Second World War, won the Field Marshal Templer Medal Book Prize in 2003. The second volume, *The Indian Army and the End of the Raj*, was Runner Up for the Templer Medal in 2014. He completed his doctorate as the Beit Research Scholar in Imperial and Commonwealth History at Balliol College, Oxford University, and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Note: Food and drink are not allowed in the room.