

FARLEY MOWAT

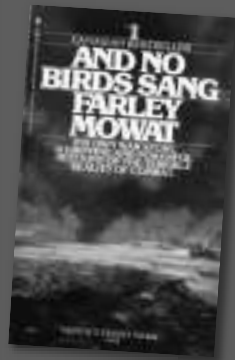
EDUCATION OF A YOUNG CANADIAN SOLDIER

Farley Mowat was born in 1921 just down the road, in Belleville, but it was many moves before he finally settled in Port Hope, and became "one of ours". A prolific author with a world of experience, he has a worldwide following with his books being translated into 52 languages.

In 1940, encouraged by his father, who had served in World War I, but rejected by the Air Force for being four pounds under the weight limit, young Farley signed up as a private with the Canadian Army. His book, *And No Birds Sang*, tells the sometimes humorous, mostly horrendous story of one young man's experience of war.

It began, with an encouraging promotion to the rank of Second Lieutenant. But being posted to a militia company with the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, seemingly to spend the rest of the war in Canada, did not impress the young soldier. However, in the spring of 1941 he was finally placed on the active list and sent to Fort Frontenac in Kingston "for disposal".

It was the summer of 1942 before Mowat was posted to England, where his education in military and other matters progressed remarkably. But how little he really learned of war is evident in a letter written to a girl in Canada on receiving word that he was finally going into battle.



I'm like a kid who's been anticipating a birthday party for years and years and finally sees his mother lighting up the candles. We are about to quit the play-acting and begin living the role we've worked and prepared for so long.

Aboard the converted passenger ship *Derbyshire*, now Lieutenant Mowat headed for Sicily and his first real experience of war. The landing on Sicily was fiercely contested. Men on both sides fell, never to rise again. As Mowat reports, one of the enemy

lay with his face turned toward me. His eyes were opened and as yet undimmed ...and they were blue, like mine. Like me he sported a wisp of blonde moustache on his sunburned face... he had fallen with his arms outflung in the way of children when they make angels in the snow. The woven gold stripe of a second lieutenant shone brightly on each sleeve.

The crossing and taking of Sicily continued to be brutal, the gradual march up the coast of Italy, more so. There were many victorious moments, some perhaps even glorious, but mostly there was simply death and destruction.

The line between brutal murder and heroic slaughter flickers and wavers... and becomes invisible.

