

October 11, 1961

Mr. Ralph Allen,
c/o Macleans Magazine,
Toronto, Canada.

Dear Ralph,

George Nelson sent me the copy of "Ordeal By Fire" which you so kindly autographed for me, and from the moment of its arrival I've been absorbed in it.

To say that I've enjoyed it would be a massive understatement. I've revelled in it. Many things were familiar (after all, this was my generation) but many more were not. Even in familiar men and things I found that my notions were still colored by contemporary prejudice overheard when I was a boy and a young man. Your research and your point of view make Henri Bourassa a three-dimensional human figure, for example, instead of the flat cardboard caricature in my mind. So too with Sam Hughes and others. (Incidentally you mention the excellent pun "le roi s'amuse". No doubt you know that after the revelations about army boot contracts he was known for a time as Sir Sham Shoes.)

Your coverage of the two world wars is full of punch and insight, and so is your handling of the long career of Willie King. I saw and heard him speaking on the political platform a few times, and I could think of no comparison except a smug little back-block preacher who has suddenly been given a chance to address the whole camp-meeting.

After his death Bruce Hutchinson's revelations made him seem a psychopathic case. Your treatment is whole and fair.

Well, I could go on like this for hours, and you will have a lot of mail to read. I consider "Ordeal by Fire" the best of the Doubleday series so far, for a number of reasons, not least the selection and arrangement of the material, and the crisp language in which it is told. It's a perfect demonstration of what Trevelyan meant when he criticized modern historical writing in which events "stand like ponds instead of running like streams. The art of history remains always the art of narrative."

Sincerely,

New England Dept of Home
Room 540, Parkside Hall Ave.,
Roslindale, Boston, Mass.

RALPH ALLEN
229 GLENROSE AVENUE
TORONTO 7, ONTARIO

Oct. 12

(1961)

Dear Tom:

Many thanks for your warm and generous note about my book. I remember when I undertook it--I hadn't done novels before but never a serious attempt at history-- that I asked you for some advice on how to go about ~~it~~ it and you were good enough to reply with great care and courtesy. As a result of your suggestions I built up a basic library of my own covering the specific things I'd have to come back to again and again, organized the research and writing into blocks of time and generally attempted to preserve my sanity against a series of hazards I'd had ~~no~~ no real experience with. It was of immense help and so were your words of ~~general encouragement~~ general encouragement.

As you discovered long before I did, this sort of project is really a tough one. I have thought ~~of~~ of it much as about the war: a good place to have been and a good place to be back from.

The damned thing nearly killed me, but I did survive it. I know this is the spirit you've brought to your books and that's why they have so much life of their own.

As ever,

Ralph Allen

RALPH ALLEN