



The Deserter

Paul Almond

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Imagine you're on a British man-o-war, anchored in an estuary of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, around 1800. Behind the high red cliffs lie hundreds of miles of uncharted wilderness. If you jump ship and are caught, you will be branded a deserter - subject to death by one hundred lashes. If you jump, the icy waters could freeze your body and claim your soul. This is your one chance for a life in the New World. Do you jump? Thomas Manning did, and his leap into uncertainty begins the epic tale of a pioneer family. The Deserter is Book One of the Alford saga, a series chronicling two hundred years of North American history.

The Deserter Details

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Author : Paul Almond

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From Reader Review *The Deserter* for online ebook

Andrea Robinson says

I have been waiting quite a while to read this. Picked it up in Nova Scotia. Great first book. Can't wait for number 2.

Jennifer | says

Synopsis:

Thomas Manning, a young, British Naval officer wanted to take a leap of faith and begin a new life in the New World. Spending months of a navy ship left oneself to imagine, and beyond Thomas' ship was a world to be discovered. Thomas recognized the potential, vast unchartered territory, new settlements and a new beginning. The only way to get to dry land was to jump ship and land in the freezing St. Lawrence water. The risk increases, if he's caught and branded a deserter, he will be subjected to death by one thousands thrashings. Thomas decides to take the risk and jump. After the initial jump, within minutes Thomas is disoriented- the frigid water leads to stiffening of his limbs, and Thomas is not sure he can get to shore. His new life begins...After fighting the water, he makes it, only to be seized by the Mik'maq. Thomas is immediately petrified, he's heard many harrowing, brutal stories concerning Europeans being held captive and killed by the savage Indians. Instead of being tortured and mistreated, the Mik'maq assist Thomas. Life in the New World is much different than expected. While he is initially able to obtain part-time employment with the French settlers, winter is very gruelling and Thomas is left on his own. Living conditions are drastic, winters long, and food scarce. Thomas wonders what his outcome will be. Will he survive his first Canadian winter? Fortunately, the Mik'maq take him under their wing once again and show him the way. Survival is still not guaranteed, but much less perilous than being on your own in the bush.

Overall Impression:

I believe this one should be placed into the hands of every young student learning the history of Canada. This saga will cover 200 years of invigorating Canadian history, hidden by the colorless classrooms in most Canadian high schools. Often Canadian history is referred to as "boring" but a few pages into "The Deserter" and you will change your mind. First and Foremost, I will declare that I am Mik'maq from the Gaspé region. Paul Almond's research is impeccable, and I read his Acknowledgments before starting the novel. When I saw the research he undertook, I was very pleased and decided to see what this book was about. What I quickly learned was this was a book written by a very skilled writer. The language is simple, the tale action-packed. Every little task in Thomas Manning's life is life-threatening. Every man for himself, rewards are very tempting, and threats are exceedingly substantial. Paul Almond's portrayal of the Mik'maq is very accurate, he embraces the true circumstances and includes the significant legends of the people. I will be passing this book around, or possibly buying others copies and holding tight to my copy. This is the first in a six book saga, I will placing all the others on my wish list.

Jan McClintock says

"The Deserter" by Paul Almond is a very enjoyable historical novel about a young man who jumps overboard from a British Navy ship while it lies just off the coast of Canada in the early 1800's. He'd been waiting a long time for his chance to start over in the New World, and he had only one chance as a deserter. Now running from the British Navy and facing a completely unknown future, Thomas Manning had only the clothes on his back and a few tools to try to stay alive and start his life over.

The opening of the book drew me in, as I immediately wanted to see if Thomas was able to make it off the ship. The settings were very vivid, and I felt the writing was quite authentic to time and place. The story moves along at a good pace and I didn't feel that it bogged down at any spot. The chapters were fine reading lengths and ended at suitable break points -- few cliffhangers that I remember. I liked the story and will definitely consider the next book in the trilogy.

NOTE: I was impressed by the editing and the layout of the Kindle-version formatting. Unlike many e-books, this one was exemplary. Congratulations to the editor!

Diane W says

This was quite an easy read. Wasn't sure I wanted to move on to the next book in the series but the ending left me in suspense about what happens next so think Book 2 will be added to my list. Can't say I would recommend it to anyone though unless early settlement of the Gaspé was of interest.

Sheila says

A young man, a midshipman in the Royal Navy has made the decision to jump ship and swim to shore in Gaspé Peninsula during the early 1800's. He is tired of the physical abuse all sailors were subjected to. He is able to swim to shore without being seen and hikes inland to try to escape the search party he knows will soon be dispatched. He is captured by a friendly MicMac band but is soon released. He spends the next year trying to build a cabin and earn some money to buy the supplies he needs. He does spend one winter in the woods with a MicMac family learning their ways and hoping to learn how to survive in the wilderness himself. He marries a young MicMac woman and together they plan a future. This is the first book in a series of this early settler. Looking forward to reading the sequel which was released earlier this year.

Sverre says

Paul Almond has based his story on an actual Royal Navy warship's arrival in Chaleur Bay, Lower Canada

(Quebec) early in the 19th century. The narrator is Thomas Manning (alias James Alford), a midshipman on the ship who escapes by swimming to the Gaspé shore through the chilly waters. Ashore he encounters members of the Micmac tribe and he finds refuge in their village. Being a deserter, he has to be constantly vigilant not to be found and caught by the Royal Marines. His ambition is to settle down and wrestle the untamed wilderness to establish his family on a farm of his own. But, whenever he thinks he can see his future more clearly he encounters unexpected perils and great hardships. Falling in love with an Indian maiden feeds his callow emotions and makes his decisions more difficult. The book concludes with tragic anguish but also happy expectations. The next five books hold promise of further adventures as Thomas settles and his progeny will become woven into the Canadian fabric.

This book is good because Almond writes about what he knows. Not only is he familiar with the locations in the story (which became communities that still exist) and the weather, flora and fauna but he also has a good grasp of the language and culture of the Micmac and the French settlers. His research has been exhaustive and he has sought advice from many for authentication. This is not great literature but it deserves to be read by anyone hungry for Canadian history. It is very suitable for young people.

Shonna Froebel says

This is the first book in a new series called the Alford Saga. Loosely based on Almond's own ancestors, this book includes a good deal of historical research as well as some artistic license.

The book begins around 1800, when a young man named Thomas Manning is on a British man o' war moored in a small bay of the Gulf of St. Lawrence riding out a spring storm. Thomas knows the price to be paid if he gets caught deserting, but he has planned in advance for just such an opportunity and knows he may not get another chance before his ship heads back to join the fight against Napoleon.

He makes his way ashore and begins the trek inland, encountering a tribe of Micmac natives. They assist his endeavors and he becomes close to them. He begins to make a home for himself, but also works at a French village building ships. He also encounters some English settlers, using an assumed name, James Alford, to hide his identity in case they are looking for him for desertion.

As he learns skills from his employer, and from the natives, Thomas begins to make a life and start his own family. This book ends with him at that point, opening the opportunities for furthering the story in later books. The story flows well and Thomas comes across as a believable character. The natives are also portrayed well and with respect. This is an interesting story and I look forward to future installments.

Carol Ann Arseneault says

Thoroughly enjoyed the history of my place of origin in this book. My dad was a great woodsman and snowshoe maker; skills acquired and passed along from his ancestors. As I read this book, I remembered many stories he would share of his own escapades as a young lad. Looking forward to the rest of this series.

Norma says

This is a fictionalized version of a family history. It is easy to read and quite interesting. The naivety of the white man in the wilderness is always interesting. What is good about Thomas is that he learns from his mistakes and tries not to repeat them. His relationship with the MicMac is somewhat typical, but a bit too

good to be true for me. It's worth the read for the information on how the native people handled the cold and snow in winter.

Diane says

I was disappointed with this book, since I was looking forward to reading the series about settling the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada. The characters are wooden and predictable. The story is mundane. The main character is a bit too honorable. It seemed a lot like a not particularly sterling young adult book.

BUT, I had violated one of my own rules- read the Author's Notes first. It turns out the main character in the book, Thomas Manning, is based on the author's relative who really did desert from HMS Bellarophon. Also, Thomas was married to a Native woman. The author does not know a lot about the rest of his relative's story but I loved that even some of the book was based on his family's history. I also like that this trilogy is about the history of the Gaspé Peninsula. But, not enough to read the other volumes.

Penny says

Written very simply, what I'd call workmanlike writing - but a good story with interesting Canadian history. Sometimes the writer uses a modern expression that seems out of place but it's a minor flaw. First of a trilogy, I will likely go on to read the other 2.

M Harris says

I read this book ahead of a trip to Gaspésie for some historical context. The plot was fast-moving and it was an easy read, and I did learn some history of the area, but I didn't find there to be that much substance to it. It was an okay story, but I didn't like it enough to read the second book.

Veronica says

This was a very easy enjoyable read that was well researched. The plot was interesting and the protagonist was a bit beyond belief - almost hero status. But to learn about the life of the MicMac and life in the settlements of the Gaspé around 1800 was great. Almost written like a young adult novel.

Terri says

Enjoyed this book. First book in the Alford Saga series. Historical fiction about pioneers in the Gaspé Coast of Canada. The first book starts in the early 1800's. A little amateurish...but still enjoyable. Appropriate for young adults as well. Appreciated that the book was "clean" no sex or foul language.

Erin says

"The Deserter" is loosely based on the author's own ancestors and takes place on the Gaspé Coast of Quebec in the early 19th century. I enjoyed the characters and the historical detail. Paul Almond really makes Thomas Manning a character that readers can root for.

I recognized a lot of the character names as they are still names we hear today in the Port Daniel and New Carlisle area (Garrett, Beebe etc). I would recommend this book especially to people interested in local Gaspésie history. I'm looking forward to reading the rest of the series.
