
**Review by John R. Grodzinski**

This sixth and concluding volume of the “Upper Canada Preserved” series focusing on the War of 1812 in Upper Canada examines the closing months of the American occupation of the Niagara Peninsula, the American failure to dislodge the British from the Northwest, and the American raids against the western district of Upper Canada. As with the earlier volumes, *The Ashes of War* is heavily illustrated and comes with a large number of maps that were prepared by the author.

As with other volumes in this series, the recounting of strategic and operational level matters is weak. As Captain General and Governor in Chief of British North America, Sir George Prevost was not a field commander and was not expected to “conjure up a military victory (that he could claim sole credit for),” instead, he supervised the allocation of the physical and financial resources and provide the land and, by default, the naval forces, to defend the provinces of British North America, a task that in the end, resulted in the successful defence of British North America. No strategy is perfect, and while Prevost made mistakes and had his faults, he did achieve the goal the British government had assigned to him.

Until June 1814, the restrictions the government imposed on Prevost to avoid offensive operations remained in place, but did not stop him from attacking Sackets Harbor, or in
supporting other offensive action. Prevost never “brushed off the difficulties and needs of Upper Canada for supplies and reinforcements” (p. 46), and instead initiated improvements to the logistical capacity and defence of the upper St. Lawrence River, the lifeline to the upper province before the war. He also sent reinforcements into the province and authorized the raising of new units; during most of 1813, he stationed himself at Kingston, where he directed the flow of reinforcements and supplies to where they were needed, while overseeing the operations of the Royal Navy.

Prevost did not, as the Feltoe writes, return to England in 1815 “to face questions about his conduct during the war” (p. 197). It was not until Prevost had learned of the charges Commodore Yeo had submitted to the Admiralty, that he requested a board of inquiry to clear his name. Unfortunately for Prevost, and for historians, that inquiry, actually a court martial—which was limited to examining Prevost’s conduct at Plattsburgh and nothing more—never sat.

Careful research would have eliminated these and other problems in this book. The reinforcements sent to the Canadas from Europe following Napoleon’s abdication did not, as is stated in the text, offer “Prevost with the opportunity to take the offensive” (p. 114); rather the government had sent reinforcements to him as part of a comprehensive strategy of securing the frontiers of both Canadas by attacking specified locations in the northern theatre. Period correspondence confirms that Prevost never “pressured” (p. 114) Captain George Downie to commit himself to a naval action at Plattsburgh—Downie acted on his own. Finally, the author suggests that Lieutenant-General Gordon Drummond, the commander of Upper Canada, would have made better use of the division assigned to the Plattsburgh expedition. Perhaps, he may have, however, the orders from London were clear, and the reinforcements that were assigned to Drummond’s command were earmarked for other objectives, none of which could be attempted since Commodore Sir James Yeo was unable to provide the necessary support, leaving the plans to be postponed until the following year.

This description of strategic concerns becomes fanciful when it turns to British planning for the 1815 campaign plan. Although British officials had commissioned surveys of rivers and waterways to develop an alternate route to the upper St. Lawrence River, a large portion of which lay contiguous to American territory, they were in no position to build “canals and locks to bypass the numerous rapids on the St. Lawrence” while the war continued, or to create an “enlarged series of land fortifications and defensive staging posts” (p. 181). The construction of substantial fortifications and a canal system would follow, but not until years after the war had ended.

Greater care is also needed regarding geographic names, such as Michilimackinac and Mackinac—the former is a region surrounding the Straits of Mackinac, the latter an island. Michilimackinac. The French and British both occupied a fort on the northern end of the Lower Michigan peninsula that was named Michilimackinac; farther east on Lake Huron, at Mackinac Island, and following the transfer of Fort Michilimackinac to the United States, the British built a
fort, which they named after the island. Little distinction was made of either name in the text, and both names were used interchangeably or together, such as “Michilimackinac (Mackinac).”

Feltoe does much better in describing the tactical actions of the closing months of the war, and nicely gives credit to the troops for their perseverance in light of the difficult operating conditions they faced. As a re-enactor he would have some insight into their experiences. Several unfortunate typos plague the text, such as when Victor Fisher, the commanding officer of the Regiment de Watteville and commander of a column during the assault on Fort Erie is given the incorrect rank of lieutenant (p. 58), however such errors speak more of the publisher than the author.

So what are we to make of this series, after six volumes retelling the events of the Anglo-American war fought between June 1812 and February 1815? With the series directed to secondary school students, the text is necessarily uncomplicated and as result, offers an adequate introduction to the wartime events in Upper Canada. Those students seeking more detail can find help by consulting the select bibliography. The images will be useful to the young student, however, the battle maps are more suited to a military history and atlas of the conflict, than in a series directed to school children. Without more detailed accounts of the action in the text, it is impossible to reconcile the detailed unit movements in the maps with the narrative.