

*A Matter of Honour: The Life, Campaigns and Generalship of Isaac Brock.* By Jonathan Riley. Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 2011. ISBN 978-1-896941-65-3. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 336. \$27.95.

While he is less well-known in the United States and vaguely remembered in Britain, Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, who died early in the War of 1812, is regarded by Canadians as the war's pre-eminent military leader and the "Saviour of Upper Canada." Interest in Brock's life is so powerful that two new biographies have been published this year. One is the subject of this review and the other is by Canadian historian Wesley B. Turner titled, *The Astonishing General: The Life and Legacy of Sir Isaac Brock.*

The author of *A Matter of Honour* is Lieutenant-General Jonathon Riley, CB, DSO, PhD currently the Master of the Armouries, responsible for the Royal Armouries collection of arms, armour and artillery held in the Tower of London. In an impressive career in the British Army that spanned nearly 40 years, Riley held battalion and brigade commands in the Balkans, division-level command in Iraq, and latterly as Deputy Commander of NATO ISAF in Afghanistan. He also completed a doctorate in history and has written 12 books on military subjects including *Napoleon and the World War, 1813* (1999 and 2007) and *Napoleon as a General: Command from the Battlefield to Grand Strategy* (2007). This is his latest book.

As War of 1812 historian Donald E. Graves, notes in his foreword, *A Matter of Honour* is "a study of a good soldier by another good soldier" (p. ix). Riley's experience in the interplay between regular troops and indigenous tribal fighters and his academic training provides him with a unique perspective towards his topic. Complicating this task is Brock's unique position as the sole British general to meet the Americans in the field during 1812; comparisons with subsequent commanders are difficult given the dramatic improvements to American tactical leadership, training and performance; and, while four other British generals fell in combat during

1812, their deaths occurred in Spain, a theatre where conditions were distinctly different to those in Canada.

Riley holds that Brock was guided by the moral compass of the era and that honour, bravery and loyalty, tinged by an impulsive nature, were his key characteristics. These attributes are evident in the examination of Brock's tenure as acting commander-in-chief of British North America between 1805 and 1807, and his later appointment as administrator and commander in Upper Canada. Here we see Brock dealing with on the one hand, "the timeless struggle between the primacy of civil authority and the requirements of sound military preparations" (p. 107); while achieving a "decisive effect" (p. 142) in establishing aboriginal engagement with Britain before hostilities commenced and prior to his meeting with the influential war leader Tecumseh.

Brock differed with his superior, Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, the commander-in-chief of British North America over pre-war plans for the defence of the Canadas. Prevost's concept relied on an operational defensive with tactical offensives as necessary, and was not to Brock's liking. Brock, like many officers serving in near isolation, may have felt local conditions were being misread and pursued matters on his own, including engaging in an alliance with the western natives and advocating the expansion of Crown authority into American territory, that committed "Britain to a strategy no one was calling for either in London or in North America" (p. 161). As inept generalship and poor preparation on the part of the Americans allowed Brock to get away with this potentially dangerous course of action-a factor that is often overlooked by historians-Riley wonders how Brock, if he had survived, would have fared against a revived American army and expanding navy in 1813 or 1814.

*A Matter of Honour* is a fresh examination of a compelling figure from the War of 1812. It is an even-handed biography that navigates clear of that mythology and hagiography that has so plagued the historiography of Sir Isaac Brock. By doing so, Riley offers a new perspective of Brock's generalship during the War of 1812.

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