

Jonathon Riley. *A Matter of Honour. The Life, Campaigns, and Generalship of Isaac Brock*. Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 2011. Pp. 336. Bibliography. Illustrations. Index. Maps. Notes. Paper, \$27.95; and Wesley B. Turner. *The Astonishing General: The Life and Legacy of Sir Isaac Brock*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2011. Pp. 248. Appendices. Bibliography. Illustrations. Index. Maps. Notes. Cloth, \$35.00.

It is fitting that Maj. Gen. Sir Isaac Brock, KB (1769-1812) receives two biographies on the eve of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of 1812. Recently retired Professor Wesley Turner of Brock University continues his study of the era by expanding on his master's thesis and his sketch of the "savior of Upper Canada" published in *British Generals in the War of 1812: High Command in the Canadas* (1999). And retired British Army Lt. Gen. Jonathon Riley, CB adds to his long list of publications and his distinguished record of military leadership with a glorifying narrative of the man who captured Detroit and died performing a captain's duty a few hundred yards from the Niagara River.

Turner wonders why there are so many accolades for someone whose "combat record during the war appears unimpressive." Looking closely, he finds that Brock "participated in two battles. He won one almost bloodlessly against a demoralized commander. He died early in a second battle yet he is remembered not as a failed leader but as its victor, thereby displacing Roger Sheaffe, the general who led the forces to victory over the American invaders" (p. 10). Even Riley displays a bit of skepticism about the general's final day: "Brock was certainly not lacking in courage but on Queenston Heights it may have edged into bravado" (p. 304). Both authors acknowledge, however, that it was Brock's unexpected and effective offensive in the summer of 1812 at forts Michlimackinac and Detroit that provided His Majesty's government with an operational depth that saved at least the western portion of Upper Canada (modern Ontario) from American domination.

In *A Matter of Honour* Riley explores in greater detail the future general's origins on the Channel Island of Guernsey, where he was the eighth son of a family of 13 children, 10 of whom reached maturity. Brock's family bought him an ensignship in the Eighth (the King's) Regiment of Foot when he was 15 years old. "With the support of his brother William, a London banker, further commissions were purchased, and in 1797 Brock became the senior lieutenant colonel of

the Forty-ninth Regiment of Foot. Remarkably, in the midst of the French Revolution he did not see combat until 1799, when his regiment participated in the battle of Egmont-op-Zee, suffering 20 percent casualties. The Forty-ninth also served as marines in Horatio Nelson's squadron during the battle of Copenhagen, where Turner argues that "Nelson's calmness under pressure as well as his aggressive leadership many have influenced Brock's thoughts and behavior when he commanded Upper Canada" (p. 30).

Riley's analysis displays an understanding of military terminology, career development, tactics, and strategy from one familiar with both eighteenth-century and modern armies. He benefitted from years spent as a student, teacher, and deputy commandant of the Joint Services Command and Staff College at Camberley and from service in Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Thus when he writes that "the very essence of generalship at the operational level" is "determining those things that are going to be decisive, and bringing these circumstances to pass" (p. 174), the reader knows that Riley speaks from both knowledge and experience.

He also knows the truth of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College adage "amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics. Thus when exploring the logistical calculations facing Brock's operational decisions, Riley demonstrates a thorough comprehension of this oft-neglected aspect of military affairs. When he exploited British command of Lake Erie during the Detroit campaign, and then in the last days of his life became apprehensive of the growing American naval efforts on the Great Lakes, Brock recognized the importance of the waterborne network supporting supply and troop movements that existed along the U.S.-Canadian border.

Nevertheless, there are a number of small errors in Riley's book that could have been eliminated by more careful copyediting. For instance, he demotes by one grade major general and Indiana Territory governor William Henry Harrison (Kentucky) along with colonels Lewis Cass and Duncan McArthur of Ohio. He assumes incorrectly that forts Miamis, Meigs, and Sandusky existed at the war's outbreak, and, although the maps are generally well done, one on page 187 mislabels Lake St. Clair as Lake Huron and deprives Grosse Pointe residents of their beloved final "e."

Turner's study may lack the professional military insights of Riley's, but it provides a better understanding of the Canadian political situation. The last chapter of *The Astonishing General*—"The Making of a Hero: Reflections on Brock"—effectively summarizes the debate over the British general's leadership at the battle of Queenston

Heights, his long-term influence on the war's outcome, and the mythology that surrounds his name. A devotee of the "Follow Me" school of infantry command, Brock (like many British general officers during this era) died while leading his men. Certainly he set a courageous example, but at the same time he risked not only his own life but the future of the province in a hazardous endeavor. Shakespeare was right, "the better part of valor is discretion."

One intriguing difference between these two books is the treatment of General Sheaffe. Riley describes him as a martinet, an insensitive commander whose career was saved by Brock's intervention after Sheaffe's troops mutinied. Turner, however, sees Sheaffe as the real hero of the battle on Burlington Heights: "He had accomplished what was needed to defeat enemy invaders holding a strong position" and for that eventually "received a well-deserved baronetcy from the British government" (p. 199).

Neither author analyzes the consequences of Brock's use of Native Americans residing in the United States. This contributed to the rise of Indian-hating U.S. politicians and ruined President Thomas Jefferson's hope that Natives would adopt a more westernized lifestyle and live in harmony with white settlers in the Oki Northwest. In the Ghent Treaty, which ended the war, His Majesty's government subsequently betrayed Natives for the third time in thirty years.

Although Riley's study is the more analytical, both biographies provide solid analyses of a man whose talents, energy, leadership, and aggression contributed significantly to keeping Upper Canada as one of George III's imperial appendages.

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