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Prescott and South Grenville

Honour in 1812: Lt. Gen Jonathon Riley in Spencerville

Category: Prescott, Augusta & Edwardsburgh/Cardinal

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Written by Alicia Wanless



Spencerville - Before me sits a gentleman. It is clear from his comportment, and his ever-present charm. He's the sort of man one can easily imagine in a Jane Austen novel sporting an officer's red coat, or better still retired to the country.

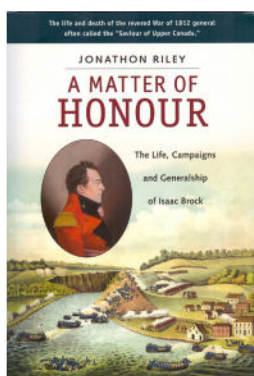
And in a way, Lieutenant-General Jonathon Riley really is that embodiment.

Riley served 36 years in the British Army, as well as Director-General and Master of the Royal Armouries. His service was nothing if not distinguished. Riley's posts included Deputy Commander of NATO ISAF in Afghanistan, Deputy Commandant of the Joint Services Staff College, Deputy Commander of the American mission to re-establish the Iraq Armed Forces, and Commanding General of the Multi-National Division in Southern

Iraq – to name but a few of his positions.

Those were his staff appointments but Jonathon Riley has also seen considerable active service. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Order for valour as commanding officer of the Royal Welch Fusiliers in Bosnia and he has served six tours in Northern Ireland, five in the Balkans and one in Central America and Sierra Leone respectively.

Riley's latest book, *A Matter of Honour: The Life, Campaigns and Generalship of Isaac Brock*, studies a familiar personage from our War of 1812



In his book, Riley attempts to translate his "experience backwards in time to interpret what Brock was doing, and to focus on his life, his campaigns and his generalship."

Capturing the historic sense of honour seems to have been a motive for Riley.

"On many occasions the things that Brock did only made sense when they were interpreted in the light of what was expected of people then," describes Riley. "Many things only make sense when you understand the code of honour amongst gentlemen, particularly amongst military officers. Honour mattered more than the law, more than self-respect ... The duel that Brock fought, the way he conducted himself, his disputes over strategy and operational planning with Prevost, his indignation at Hull at the siege of Detroit asking for the honours of war when he had not put up a proper defence and indeed the manner of his death, putting

himself in the place of a captain. They only make sense if you look at them through the 18th century notion of honour."

In listening to Riley's explanations, his calm way of speaking and articulate British English, this sense of honour seems far more present than lost, but the concept extends far beyond pleasant manners.

"To an 18th century gentleman, and it is very much a male thing," says Riley "a gentleman's honour, which extended to his family, was all about the accepted code of behaviour, what was expected of you in relation to others, how you conducted yourself to your opposites, your peers, your superiors and your inferiors and how they conducted themselves towards you. It was about your position in society and in the world. And anyone who sought to denigrate that apposition, or insulted or questioned it, was impugning your honour and the whole way in which you conducted yourself, and your whole status in the world."

For someone like Brock, a sense of honour was multifaceted.



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