

John Grodzinski. *Defender of Canada: Sir George Prevost and the War of 1812*, Norman OK, University of Oklahoma Press, Appendices, Notes. 375pp. ISBN 978-0806143873 (Hardback). Price £21.39.

The bi-centennial of the hitherto forgotten war of 1812, between the United Kingdom and the United States, has encouraged the publishing of several works on that war. Many of these works have tended to concentrate on either the pelagic naval history, or the specific land battles on the Canadian frontier. Grodzinski's work tackles an aspect of the war that has been less developed in those other works. He analyses the role of the Governor-General of Canada and Commander in Chief of the British forces, British North America. In doing so he deals with the struggle for the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain in some detail, considering both the military and the naval aspects. Such details are set as the background to his study of Prevost. His thesis seems to be to rehabilitate (he says "reassess" (p.8)) the reputation of Sir George Prevost. He repudiates the attacks on Prevost's leadership that were made contemporaneously or immediately after the events. Because of the evidential citations the work avoids being hagiographical; though it has to be observed that in developing his reassessment he argues that every decision taken by Prevost was correct in the light of all the evidence he can present. His notes and bibliography show that a wide range of sources has been consulted. His military explanations indicate precision, though as a minor criticism his description of the constitutional position of the Privy Council is not quite accurate. The absence of almost any reference in the book to Brock should also be taken into account.

The book begins with a survey of Prevost's earlier commands, including Nova Scotia and Martinique. It begins the study of Prevost in the 1812 war with the state of affairs in 1812 he found taken as a given. Grodzinski attributes Prevost's reticence early in the war to London prohibiting him from 'striking offensively' "except it be for the purpose of preventing or rebelling Hostilities" (p55). Describing Prevost as 'no stranger to naval affairs' (p. 62) Grodzinski describes Prevost's work in preparing the Provincial Marine. Indeed a feature of the book is that it gives the role of the Provincial Marine its proper place in the war.

While the book considers Prevost's role in all the inland operations, from the thrust into Michigan and the defence of Upper and Lower Canada to the naval position on the Great Lakes and the Royal Navy's entry into inland waters, the important chapters in respect to Prevost's reputation are those relating to the Plattsburg campaign, Yeo's attack on him and the prospective court martial.

As a result, the most detailed study of the military and naval operations are those of the Plattsburg campaign. This was crucial to Prevost's reputation. Grodzinski analyses in some detail the conflict between Yeo, who commanded the naval forces on the Lakes, and Prevost. Yeo thought the battle on Lake Champlain was lost by Prevost's lack of action. Grodzinski justifies Prevost's withdrawal of forces back to Canada citing the fate of General Burgoyne who did not retreat from Lake Champlain. Prevost had his troop numbers limited by the requirements of other theatres, but he could be congratulated on his planning. Grodzinski also argues that Prevost's failure to press home the attack on Lake Champlain ought to be compared with other losses and stalemates in other fronts of the land war. Yeo alleged that Prevost, ignored the limited capabilities of the lake flagship, failed to start the land

advance when it had been planned (thus allowing the Americans to attack the navy) and did not press home the attack on Plattsburg thereby losing the chance of attacking the Americans' lake vessels. These accusations were to haunt Prevost to a death that occurred ahead of the court martial, before which he was to appear, could be convened. Grodzinski assesses that it was the Royal Navy which damaged Prevost's reputation; a reputation which, he argues, subsequent writers have accepted too readily.

As the only recent study of Prevost's role as commander in chief the work adds to the understanding of the command responsibilities of the British North America Act command and gives another basis for considering the role of Prevost.

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