

Review Essay

The Battle of Lake Erie: American Perspectives on the Battle and its Aftermath

David Frew. *Perry's Lake Erie Fleet: After the Glory*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012. 126 pp., illus, index. US\$ 19.99; ISBN 9781609497.

Walter P. Rybka. *The Lake Erie Campaign of 1813: I Shall Fight Them This Day*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012. 142 pp. illus, maps, index. US\$ 19.99; ISBN 9781609496104.

David Curtis Skaggs (ed.). *The Battle of Lake Erie and its Aftermath: A Reassessment*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013. vi, 274 pp. illus, maps. US\$ 38.95, cloth; ISBN 9781606351796.

The American defeat of the British squadron on Lake Erie, on 10 September 1813, extended the United States navy's string of victories on the high seas to the Great Lakes. This victory stood in stark contrast to the indecisive actions on Lake Ontario, and led to the retreat and defeat of the British forces that had blocked the American advance to retake Detroit and invade south-western Upper Canada. The celebration of the 200th anniversary of the victory was one of the most highly anticipated events in the docket of War of 1812 anniversary celebrations. The three books reviewed here were produced to provide those interested in the battle, with an understanding of the event and its place in the larger war between the United States and Britain.

David Frew's *Perry's Lake Erie Fleet: After the Glory* and Walter P. Rybka's, *The Lake Erie Campaign of 1813: I Shall Fight Them This Day* were both published by The History Press. This press is committed to publishing history with a local appeal, written by local authors, and for a general readership. Frew is a resident of Erie, Pennsylvania, a professor at Mercyhurst University and past director of the Erie County Historical Society. His volume was produced to address the post-battle events and life courses for some of the men who fought in the engagement. Frew wanted to write a non-academic work that the visitor to War of 1812 sites, such as the reconstructed US Brig *Niagara*, and the supporting museum at Erie, could take away. Frew is aware that local history is often skipped over in schools, as teachers are not confident of their knowledge, and his book is offered as a resource. Walter Rybka's book had a different origin. His original goal was to write "the definitive text on the Battle of Lake Erie" (p. 7). Well into the project, he was encouraged to produce a smaller version that would inform the lay person about the Battle of Lake Erie and the workings of a sailing ship-of-war. Rybka, a USCG licensed master, has commanded the current *Niagara* for the past 20 years. These books are not academic works, nor definitive statements on the events or the people who

lived through them. The two volumes lay out a version of the story for the general public, new to this topic.

As noted above, Walter Rybka's *The Lake Erie Campaign of 1813* focuses on the preparations for and the battle of Lake Erie. Interwoven into the narrative is a description and explanation of the nature and working of sailing ships-of-war. The book starts with an overview of the War of 1812. British interference with American trade and seamen's rights are the two causes given for the war; the tensions in the northwest caused by the American desire for expansion into Aboriginal territory are not mentioned. He outlines the events of war, mainly in the Great Lakes region, but also the victorious American frigate actions at sea, the British raids around the Chesapeake and the peace treaty which brought the war to a close. British impressment of American sailors takes center stage over the economic causes of the war, but his description of the impress and life afloat in the British navy ("...treated like ill-used slaves." (p. 12)) is a bit of an overstatement. He claims that British officers' fear of their men deserting resulted in the denial of shore leave. Shore leave was in fact regularly allowed in the British navy, with the vast majority of sailors returning to their ships. His remarks that the three American frigate victories were of little avail as the British simply sent out more warships, and that privateering was seldom lucrative, reflect a more recent historic perspective on both these aspects of the war.

As with any brief summary of a war, this one does cut corners and occasionally oversimplifies events. In discussing the American strategic targets for 1813, Rybka states that control of Lake Ontario was sought in order to attack Kingston, since Montreal was too well fortified (p. 21). Yet, four pages later the Americans attempt an attack against Montreal, which was defeated at Chrysler's Farm in November (p. 25). The shift in plans is not explained. On the Niagara frontier, Rybka has the British retaliating for the American burning of Newark by raiding the American settlements along the Niagara River and then capturing Fort Niagara, in December 1813. The British captured the fort first then laid waste to the American settlements. His description of the Chesapeake theatre does not note that the British began their raids in the Bay in February 1813, and that although the main force left in October 1814, raids continued into December, with the British actually withdrawing from the bay only in March 1815.

The building of the Lake Erie squadron forms the second chapter, introducing Commodore Isaac Chauncey, sailing master Daniel Dobbins, ship builder Henry Eckford, and Lieutenant Jesse Elliott. After describing Dobbins' knowledge of the upper lakes and his ship-building activity, Rybka notes Elliott's active engagement early in the war, with notable service on Lake Ontario, at Black Rock and off Fort Erie, which creates a favourable impression of the often-maligned lieutenant. Oliver Hazard Perry arrived at Erie in March 1813 and set to work finishing the construction and outfitting of the vessels building at Erie. Manning the American squadron was a big problem for Perry. He and Chauncey corresponded about the quality and the race of the men the latter sent to Lake Erie. Rybka dismisses the racial focus of past commenters on the exchange, instead stressing the seamen's overall quality and suggesting the dregs were sent from the Lake Ontario squadron. "The British camp" (p. 54) receives short notice, with the appointment

and arrival of Robert Barclay at Amherstburg, the site of the British naval base on Lake Erie. The comparison of crew size between the antagonists, which ends the chapter, is subject to some question. Readers will not know the source used to support the claimed 572 to 532 British advantage in crew numbers. The source is an article by Hendry, Morrissey and Skaggs whose estimate has a problem in listing 204 Royal Navy officers and men.¹ Rybka states sixty-seven Royal Navy seamen and officers (pp. 54-55) were sent to the upper lake, prior to the battle, thus the 572 appears a bit high. The majority of the British squadron's crews were made up of the Provincial Marine (sailors employed to work on Government vessels) and soldiers. Rybka states that nearly a third were British navy sailors, when sixty-seven of 572, is not quite 12 percent.

Chapter 3 reviews the limited British blockade of Erie and the conditions of the two squadrons in the summer of 1813. It begins with Barclay's missed opportunity in July to attack the American squadron while its two largest ships (*Lawrence* and *Niagara*) were devoid of guns, with one crossing the bar at the mouth of the harbour, the other having just cleared the bar. Barclay is not heard of again until the end when he is forced to meet the American squadron as a result of the severely limited food supplies at Amherstburg. The chapter traces Perry's movements from Erie to the west end of the lake, ending with his anchoring at Put-in-Bay on 6 September. At this time, he established a line of battle and orders for the men commanding the nine vessels in his squadron. These orders were not perfectly clear as he required that they keep their position in the line of battle and "in all cases to keep near the *Lawrence* as possible" (p. 67). This order came to play a significant role in the subsequent Perry-Elliott controversy.

The battle takes three chapters, from the opening movements to the fight itself and the aftermath. The first chapter details the early movements by both squadrons on 10 September. Of the two opponents, the Americans had the more difficult manoeuvres to come into their desired line of battle. This was accomplished with a feeble breeze and the luck of the weather gauge shifting, thus turning the initial British advantage to the Americans. The next chapter describes the engagement itself, focusing on the positions and action aboard the USS *Lawrence* and HMS *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte* with less emphasis on the *Niagara* until Perry came aboard after leaving the *Lawrence*. The physical experience of the battle comes through in Rybka's description of the engagement, the damage to the vessels and, most clearly, in the human cost. A short chapter describes the aftermath of the battle, the surgeons' work, the burials, the invasion of Upper Canada and the British defeat at Moraviantown (5 October 1813). Rybka declares that the Battle of Lake Erie was not a turning point in the war, for neither side had the ability to fully exploit a victory.

With battle over, Rybka turns to the post-war controversy between Perry and Elliott, based on the fact that Elliott held back in the *Niagara* while Perry and his men

¹ Douglas L. Hendry, Charles C. Morrissey and David C. Skaggs. "British Personnel at the Battle of Lake Erie." *Inland Seas* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 298-314. The number is arrived at by counting the number of men they list in the appendix of the article with the notation Royal Navy next to their name.

were mauled by HMS *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*. Personality, wounded honour, and pride appear to have ramped up the rhetoric, accusations and calls for inquiries not only from the two central figures but from their supporters. Despite Perry's early death (1819), the debate over Elliott's behaviour did not go away. Elliott weathered the tempest (which kept reappearing) and continued to serve until his death, 32 years later. A final brief chapter addresses the efforts to preserve and then reconstruct the *Niagara* as a living memorial of the engagement.

Throughout his book Rybka uses diagrams to illustrate ship construction and handling. These diagrams and their accompanying descriptions are outstanding at conveying their intended points, rendering complex sail handling far easier to comprehend than words alone. Numerous images are spread throughout the book, some well-known, others new. Of note is the image of Perry's unique signal system using a few flags whose meaning depended on where in the ship's rigging they were flown (p. 68).

There are three appendices, including the instructions for gun drill, rank, and pay in the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812 and a table describing each of the opposing squadrons. The latter seems useful, the first is interesting, but the middle one needs to be tied into the text somehow.

Rybka does not provide a formal bibliography or reference notes, but uses his preface to introduce the reader to a selection of secondary sources and the personal papers and official documents found in British and American archives. The material cited is largely American in origin and perspective. Rybka's use of original archive material is one of the strengths of his book. Quotes from diaries and official correspondence offer the lay reader a glimpse of the subject's "voice" addressing the particular event Rybka is describing. Even the book's subtitle, "*I Shall Fight Them This Day*" employs a unique Perry quote, an example of his solid use of documents to flesh out the story.

In *Perry's Lake Erie Fleet: After the Glory*, David Frew presents 22 vignettes, most of which occurred after the battle described by Rybka, and almost all of which are exceedingly brief. Frew believes that what happened afterward has been largely ignored, but was just as important as the battle itself and requires a definitive book. He begins by reviewing the history of Erie's natural harbour which became the American naval base on the upper lakes during the War of 1812. That military usage shaped the area's early history. Victory over the British squadron established a pride and place for the community, though that seemed to disappear with the closing of the naval installation and the subsequent rise and fall of a shipping industry. Frew's aim is to inform people about the stories from the War of 1812 that helped to form the community and gave it a special place within the early American Republic.

The second chapter concerns Usher Parsons, who served as surgeon on board the U.S. Brig *Lawrence* during the battle, and whose diary is one of the best descriptions of a surgeon's world leading up to, during and after a battle. We return to Parsons in chapter 5 which describes the wintering of the American squadron at Erie in part of the harbour that became known as Misery Bay. The sickness, suffering, and death were reported vividly

in Parsons' diary.

Daniel Dobbins receives similar treatment with two chapters, separated by the 1814 American campaign to recapture the British held fort at Mackinac. The first describes his prewar experience on the lakes as a merchant sailing master. Frew states that Dobbins was perhaps the officer with the most practical knowledge of the lakes serving under Perry. Perry did not use Dobbins appropriately, employing him as the master of the squadron's supply vessel rather than in one of the faster armed schooners. Perry's mistreatment of Dobbins extended to not mentioning him in the dispatch stating who was involved in the victory over the British (Dobbins was not present at the battle) which resulted in Dobbins having to seek a prize share on his own. It appears that the commander who replaced Perry, Arthur Sinclair, made better use of Dobbins' knowledge and contacts along Erie's north shore in 1814.

Chapters 9 through 12 describe incidents in the 1814 American campaign on the upper lakes, beginning with a brief account of the American raid on York, the capital of Upper Canada, in April 1813. Frew notes the devastating raids at Ports Dover and Ryerse and claims they were the reason (along with the York raid) for the British sending troops to seize Washington and burning the President's mansion and Congress. While this is a common myth from the war, the attack on Washington had more to do with the steady escalation of the raids in the Chesapeake in 1813 and 1814, along with the British confidence in going after bigger targets. Arthur Sinclair's unsuccessful attack against Mackinac is described as is the destruction of the British schooner *Nancy*. Chapters 9 and 12 deal with Lieutenant Miller Worsley, the only British officer featured in any of the three books. Worsley's work at the British supply base on Georgian Bay, his defense of the schooner *Nancy*, and the capture of the American vessels *Tigress* and *Scorpion* are summarized.

Two chapters address the Perry-Elliott controversy. Frew is more open to Elliott's side of the story, questioning Perry's switch from praising Elliott immediately after the battle to his later criticism. He cites Barclay's court martial testimony that the *Niagara* stayed at a distance till late in the engagement, coming up at the critical moment when it could have the most serious effect on the British, to show Elliott's good side. The author accuses Perry of pampering a badly-injured Barclay in order to obtain his favour and support against Elliott. This seems to be a bit of a misreading, for it was common practice at the time for opponents who had just attempted to kill each other to offer compassionate care (especially to wounded adversaries) after the battle. Frew's suggestion that the British naval officers constituting the court martial (not, as he states, military court) were heavily influenced by Perry's correspondence is mistaken; it was the accumulated correspondence between Barclay and his superiors, Sir James Lucas Yeo, commanding on Lake Ontario, and Maj-General Proctor (and Proctor's with Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost) that most likely led the court to arrive at its findings. When discussing James F. Cooper's involvement in the controversy, Frew states Elliott's side of the fateful day which leaves Perry in a very poor light. Though he ends with the conclusion that it might be better not to assign blame to either officer, his narrative tilts towards Elliott.

Frew touches on the fate of Perry's squadron, with a focus on the *Lawrence* and *Niagara*. Another chapter deals with the current reconstructed *Niagara*. The final chapter speaks to the remembrance of the past, through such events as the 200th anniversary of the engagement and public education activities.

This is a book with an important and noble purpose, to inform a general readership about the past, the events that happened within a particular locality and which served to shape that area's development and sense of self. It focuses (for the most part) on the post-battle events which often are overlooked for the more exhilarating moments just before victory or loss. Unfortunately, this book does not deliver on its goal. Some of the entries are so short that they have little to impart to the reader. One example is the second entry, which is a brief history of the native people living in the Great Lakes region from before first contact up to the early nineteenth century. Three pages of text simply cannot do this with any substance. The oversimplification is a disservice to the various cultures being discussed and the historians who have studied their experience.

The overall ordering of the mini-stories is another problem. One chapter deals with Perry's return after the battle to Put-in-Bay and the American defeat of the British army in October. This is followed by a chapter about the fortifications and frontier life prior to the war. Next is a description of Usher Parsons' experience caring for the American crews while they wintered at Misery Bay (1813-14), which is followed by the story of the British seizing of Michilimackinac, in July 1812. This back and forth movement in time continues throughout the book and is confusing. It prevents the reader from seeing the interconnections among the sequence of events that occurred from the summer of 1812 through to the end of 1814.

The author makes a number of statements that serve to inflate the accomplishments being discussed. For example, Frew refers to the American's having "captured an entire fleet" (p. 12). The British vessels were really a squadron of six undermanned vessels, the largest carrying nineteen assorted guns. Since the Great Lakes were viewed as a station (by the Americans immediately in 1812, by the British in 1813 and more formally a detached service in 1814) the ships on the various lakes formed squadrons, thus both commanding officers led a squadron, not a fleet.

Frew states that the Battle of Lake Erie helped to end the War of 1812 (p. 10). Rybka's view (as noted above) is that the Battle had little impact on the war. The war ended 15 months later after many other significant events, with the American economy broken and the British weary after 23 years of nearly constant warfare in Europe. If anything, it could be said that the Battle of Lake Erie helped to continue the war, more than end it.

In the story of Dobbins, Frew relates how he was captured at Mackinac, released as a prisoner of war on parole, and then was taken again by the British as he sailed past Detroit on a naval ship, having thus broken his parole. Frew states Dobbins was sentenced to death (by whom or through what process is not stated) but managed to escape and flee to Washington where he provided the naval secretary with information about the British navy on Lakes Huron and Erie (p. 47). The Royal Navy had not yet arrived on the Great Lakes; it was the Provincial Marine manning the vessels at

Amherstburg. Rybka also recounts Dobbins' second capture and breaking of his parole but indicates he asked for protection from a British officer he knew. The British apparently released him, placing him in charge of a vessel carrying wounded men to Cleveland, after which he went to Erie before being asked by an American Militia officer to visit Washington (p. 33). Frew's version has more swash-buckle, but appears to condense the truth.

In reading through the book, I had the sense that Perry and Barclay were the only military leaders in the theatre. Perry is seen liberating Detroit and capturing Amherstburg. Barclay is alone with the agonizing decision to fight or retreat from the lake. The failure to mention British Major General Henry Procter when discussing Barclay's situation at Amherstburg or the American Major General William Harrison's role in the invasion of Upper Canada is a bit misleading.

A number of factual errors also tarnish the work. Frew attributes the massive explosion at York during the American invasion in April 1813 to "a British military ship at the dock" being set on fire (p. 51). It was the York garrison's powder magazine that exploded, wounding or killing over 200 American soldiers. His suggestion that British naval captains, who lost a ship (or a squadron), were court martialed "so that military tacticians could learn from their experience" is mistaken (p. 82). The main reason for a court martial was to establish responsibility for the loss, and punish any guilty party. Any lessons learned were often secondary.

The book is heavily illustrated with images, including recent photographs. The most interesting photographs are of the wreck of the *Niagara* and the first re-build from the Jerry Skrypzak Collection (pp. 98-103). The maps are rough drawings that can orient the reader to where events took place. The single appendix gives the tonnage, length and armament of the American and British squadrons on Lake Erie. A short bibliography lists secondary sources.

Professor emeritus David Curtis Skaggs is the editor of the collection of papers that constitute the third book in this review. *The Battle of Lake Erie and its Aftermath: A Reassessment* is intended as an update of an earlier offering by Skaggs and Jeff Welsh.² Its aim is to present to anyone interested in the War of 1812 – general public, military enthusiast or academic historian – a readable and informative source for this engagement. The book is divided into three sections, Military Operations, Consequences and Memory.

The first section, as the name suggests, deals with the military campaign of which the Battle of Lake Erie was only one piece. The contest between the two opposing squadrons was for control over the lake as the key transport route. With a win, the Americans could retake Detroit and launch a second foray into Upper Canada. If the British won the engagement, they could maintain the status quo for the time being, control of the upper lakes and the region extending into the north western edge of American territory. Five articles discuss the events that took place. Larry Nelson begins

² William J. Welsh & David C. Skaggs. (eds.), *War on the Great Lakes: Essays Commemorating the 175th Anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1991).

with an analysis of the struggle to control the Maumee River valley, the overland route through which the Americans attempted to re-capture Detroit (from September 1812 through January 1813). His assessment is that the American campaign here was a disaster and showed how failure to control the lake would make the Americans unable to utilize the Maumee to regain Detroit.

Skaggs pens two chapters in this section. The first discusses the effort to gain control of the lake, the second the joint operation of Harrison and Perry to invade Upper Canada. The first briefly describes the effort to build and man vessels at Erie to defeat the British squadron on the lake. Oliver Perry is described as an active, intelligent and determined officer, constructing the squadron and going to fight undermanned. While Skaggs compares armament between the opposing squadrons (with the Americans well ahead), he does not compare their manning, though he notes both were short of complement. His second offering in the collection concerns the combined operation to invade Upper Canada at Amherstburg and the defeat of the British army at Moraviantown. This detailed description of the collaboration between Perry and General Harrison is exhaustive, noting that it represents one of the few times army-navy cooperation was successful in the early American Republic. The success appears rooted in each recognizing the other's skills, a mutual appreciation and appropriate deference.

Michael Palmer covers the Perry-Elliott controversy through a discussion of centralized versus decentralized control. Palmer reminds us of the context in which Perry and his fellow officers existed, where decentralized leadership style (epitomized by Lord Nelson) stood in contrast to centralized control through the use of signal flags from the overall commander's ship during a squadron engagement. Nelson led men by inspiration, example, and pre-battle discussions. He went into battle knowing his subordinates understood what their commander wanted to accomplish, because he had talked to them about different options for various situations that might appear. Palmer states that Perry acquitted himself and his ship (the *Lawrence*) quite well during the engagement, but failed as a squadron leader for not directing his squadron after the engagement commenced. Indeed, he offers that Perry turned an easy win into a costly and dragged out fight. Palmer believes Perry established a centralized command when he issued sailing orders for a line of battle, along with the exhortation of closing with the enemy. Yet, in the beginning stages of the battle with the American squadron strung out in line, with *Lawrence* rapidly closing on the British flag ship *Detroit* and the *Niagara* (Elliott's ship) lagging behind the slower sailing *Caledonia*, Perry did not attempt to make a signal for Elliott to leave his spot in the line and close with the other British brig (*Queen Charlotte*). Palmer holds that Perry, unlike Nelson, did not have subordinates, especially Jesse Elliott, who could see what was needed quickly and act accordingly, and that was the result of not preparing them ahead of time.

Brian L. Dunnigan discusses the American attempt to recapture Mackinac in the summer of 1814. With control of the upper lakes, it would seem easy for the United States to retake the fort and trading post captured by the British in the early weeks of the war. This was not the case. Colonel Croghan, who led the mission, doubted he could retake the fort with the number of men he had. The British had added to the fort's defenses,

including fortifying the high ground above the fort. Hungry, cold and wet, the defeated Americans returned south, witnessing the destruction of the British schooner *Nancy* and leaving the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* behind to prevent supplies from reaching Mackinac, only to have both captured.

The second section, Consequences, has four articles that deal primarily with the impact of the battle (indeed the war) on the Native North Americans living in the area from the Ohio Valley to the eastern shore of the Mississippi. Daniel P. Barr starts before the War of 1812 with an examination of the Delaware Indians' efforts to walk a neutral line (with a list towards the Americans) and adapt to each change in their circumstances. They attempted to blend into the American world, adjusting treaties to accommodate the United States, and rejecting the call to return to traditional ways and resist the Americans. After the war, they were moved further west with other Native tribes, for the Americans rejected the idea of sharing the space with any Indians.

Ginette Aley tells the story of the Battle of Tippecanoe (in 1811) and the gradual settlement of the Indiana Territory through the experiences of John Tipton, a soldier, frontiersman and public official. Aley suggests that Tipton, like most of the men who fought at Tippecanoe and later in the War of 1812 in the northwest, was protecting his home and securing his future. Tippecanoe was the beginning of the war in the Northwest with the Americans attempting to shatter the Native alliance that Shawnee Chief Tecumseh was forming and to gain firm control over the area, though neither was accomplished until after the British defeats in September and October 1813. The war left the aboriginals with an uncertain future. Tipton was one of the men that helped to establish settlers in the Indiana Territory and to remove the native people to the west of the Mississippi.

John P. Bowes uses the lead up to the Black Hawk War (1832) to illustrate the persistence of American fears that the British were promoting Indian rebellion long after the War of 1812 ended such support. Rumours, misinterpreted First Nations' movements, and a general suspicion of Aboriginal motives were made real by the incursion of Black Hawk and his followers, unfortunately known as the British Band. In the aftermath of Black Hawk's defeat, the notion of removing all aboriginals in the Indiana and Illinois Territories to west of the Mississippi appeared to be the only possible course of action to the Americans. Even groups that had been loyal to America were pushed west, as seen in Barr's article above.

Phyllis Gernhardt looks at the settlement of Fort Wayne and the surrounding land. Here we see the tug of two different forces against the Indian occupation of this area. First, settlers entered the area, followed by the government erecting a fort and limiting contact between aboriginal and settler, forcing all transactions through a government appointed mediating process. This was primarily to keep the peace by forcing the aboriginals to deal with the government and restricting the opportunity for settlers to take advantage of them, potentially causing an escalation of tensions. In time the settler restrictions were loosened and the First Nations groups were restricted, experiencing the loss of land through new treaties and American encroachment. Finally the area population balance edged towards the Americans and the aboriginals found

themselves a powerless minority, subject to removal.

These four articles speak of a nebulous border and expansive middle ground, areas where control was disputed and possibilities seemed open to both the aboriginals and the Americans. In all four, the broad border is narrowed to the width of the Mississippi River and the middle ground is progressively claimed by the United States and the aboriginals driven off, pushed further west. Defeat in battle, remaking of treaties to favour the Americans, and gradual American settlement of the middle ground are the forces that supported the claims and drove the push west. All authors suggest that the American victory in Lake Erie and at Moraviantown were critical for such expansion. As a block, the four papers provide an insightful and disturbing view of how the area was “settled.”

The final article in this section is by Charles E. Brodine, Jr., who gives us the story of Lieutenant Thomas Holdup Stevens, the commander the US Schooner *Trippe* at the Battle of Lake Erie. From humble origins Thomas Holdup, who adopted the last name of his patron, proceeded to work his way through the naval chain of command, achieving the command of the Washington Navy Yard, in which he died in 1841. This life of a minor naval officer is an excellent illustration of how an officer progressed through his career. The power of a patron and some good luck helped the man with intelligence, talent and discipline succeed. This is a unique study, well told and will be of keen interest to those studying the development of naval officers.

Section three focuses on remembrance with an article about Perry’s battle flag and a second on the reconstructed US Brig *Niagara*. Deborah L. Trupin and J. Scott Harmon discuss the restoration of the famous flag Perry had made and flew during the battle, inscribed with Captain Lawrence’s exhortation “Don’t Give up the Ship.” The article details the history of the flag and an earlier attempt at preservation. This powerful icon of American naval history was in a serious state of decay when Trupin was tasked to determine what was needed to restore the flag. Removal of the stitching and paint from previous efforts to maintain the flag was the major hurdle followed by a cleaning years of dust and dirt collected in the fabric. The restored flag is now on permanent display in the Naval Academy Museum, in Annapolis. This chapter will be of special interest to those involved in the preservation of material artifacts. It should also impress the visitor to such museums, who seldom considers the amount of painstaking work that goes into preserving the piece of history they view on the other side of the display case glass.

The final chapter in the book is by Walter P. Rybka, author of the first book reviewed. It is a detailed explanation of the sailing qualities of the present *Niagara* with an application of these findings back in time to the original. The description underlines that the primary purpose of *Niagara* (and the other ships engaged in battle that day) was as a platform for cannons to inflict damage upon the enemy. This chapter’s technical details may give less informed readers some difficulty, but it is the best explanation of how the characteristics of the ships-of-war on the lakes influenced how they were handled in different conditions that I have read.

There are five maps in the book, the first of which is numbered Map 4 and is from a book by Skaggs and Nelson.³ Three images appear in the article about Lieutenant

³ David C. Skaggs & Larry L. Nelson. (eds.). *The Sixty Years’ War for the Great Lakes, 1754-*

Stevens and six images of Perry's battle flag in various states of restoration in the article detailing that process. The bibliography includes archival sources, published primary documents, and secondary sources (though not all are mentioned in the footnotes of the various articles). The sources employed by the separate authors within the book are excellent, with most papers having extensive endnotes.

As noted above, this volume was intended as an update to the earlier collection of papers on the Battle of Lake Erie, edited by Welsh and Skaggs in 1991. The current volume is entirely different, representing the increased interest in the role of and impact on the First Nations living in the large area affected by these events, and the recent work on memorialization. The older edition had one article dealing with aboriginal involvement in the Lake Erie campaign, and the impact of that involvement, whereas the present book has four. The original collection had three articles on archival and secondary sources about the War of 1812 in the western theatre, whereas the work under review here replaces those with two concerning "Memory." Another significant difference between the two is the absence in the present volume of any chapters on the British players in the events, or the British perspective on the war in this theatre. The earlier collection had four such chapters. Overall, Skaggs' current edition is an entirely new collection examining the battle from very different perspectives than the earlier collection.

What all three texts reviewed here share is a distinctly American focus (even with Frew's pieces on Lieutenant Worsley, RN) with little or no real in-depth discussion of the British involvement in the events surrounding the Battle of Lake Erie. It seems that Rybka and Frew omit details on the British side primarily because of limited space and the intended American audience. An article or two focusing on the British perspective, the British leaders, the food and supply difficulties at Amherstburg, or the impact of the outcome of the battle on Native People remaining in Upper Canada would have added to Skaggs' collection; their absence is unexplainable.

The three books represent two very different approaches to history. The first two are intended to provide a summary of events and portraits of people involved in the Battle of Lake Erie and its aftermath for a general readership. There is no effort to supply new insights on the events or re-evaluations of the historiography. Rybka accomplishes this task with some sins of omission. Frew's efforts are less successful as a result of over simplification through excessive summary and error in his facts. This is frustrating as his book lays out the clearest explanation for why good, short, readable histories are needed. Skaggs' volume represents the more academic, archival research-based historical approach. Although it is intended for general readers, it will certainly appeal to the academic whose work is on the War of 1812, the Great Lakes area, First Nations, or touches on these domains.

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