

Red Coats & Grey Jackets

Donald E. Graves, *Red Coats & Grey Jackets: The Battle of Chippawa, 5 July 1814*, Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994, 210 pages (paper), \$18.99.

In *Red Coats & Grey Jackets*, Donald Graves offers a detailed examination of the 5 July 1814 Battle of Chippawa. This British defeat has usually been ignored by Canadian writers but celebrated by Americans since it was one of the few land victories achieved by U.S. forces during the War of 1812. Graves first became involved with Chippawa in 1991 when a proposal was made to erect a commercial building on the battlesite. His research established that slain soldiers of both nations were buried there and this has helped preserve the field from further development. As part of the campaign of the Chippawa Battlefield Preservation Society, Graves has reproduced

his original research in the form of a book. Both specialists and general readers will be pleased by the results because the author possesses a real understanding of early 19th century military practices and is able to convey his knowledge through clear prose that is free of jargon.

After a brief review of the course of the war up to 1814, the author looks at the state of the two forces that were to meet at Chippawa. Graves devotes a half-dozen chapters to the actual engagement and skilfully merges accounts by participants with official military records. The three maps that accompany the narrative make it possible to follow the movements on both sides and the book contains one hundred illustrations. The appendices offer lists of casualties and discuss a number of myths that have grown up around the battle. For example, Graves convincingly puts to rest the legend that the victorious Americans burned the bodies of their fallen opponents, and proves that they were simply buried instead.

Graves' examination shows that the battle was fought primarily by seasoned professionals. This helps explain why such a short encounter led to so many casualties. The author estimates that between musket skirmishes in the surrounding woods and artillery battles on the plain some 200 combatants were killed. Graves wants his readers to understand that war at any time is "brutal business" and his discussion of the weapons employed at the battle certainly bear this out. For example, at a range of 700 yards, a common twelve pound cannon ball could penetrate thirty-six human beings. That sort of technical information makes it easier for a modern reader to understand how dangerous the life of a 19th century infantryman really was.

This book, with its balanced account of the actions on both

sides, is intended to appeal to readers in both the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, some research-related omissions and minor errors appear to have survived the editorial process. For example, Appendix C, which deals with weapons, includes a string of rather curious imperial to metric conversions. We are told that a six pound cannonball somehow weighed 13.2 kilograms, or more than twenty-nine pounds. In Appendix E Graves presents a list of twenty-one militiamen killed at the battle, but it too seems to be unreliable. A quick check of the pension lists published in the 11 December 1817 *Niagara Spectator* revealed that Sergeant Solomon Mills of the 2nd York died at Chippawa, but his name is not included. I first examined the newspaper because Graves has Private Stephen Peer listed twice, but the text, and official records, suggest there was only one individual with that name killed at the battle. Obviously these are minor problems that will not trouble the general reader, but a more thorough review of the appendices and notes seems in order before a second edition is published.

Graves has much to be proud of with this work. *Red Coats & Grey Jackets* is an engaging and informative example of the best sort of military history being written today.

George Sheppard