

*Redcoated Ploughboys: The Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada, 1813-1815* by Richard Feltoe

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(a book which appears in the bibliography but is not quoted), and any literature questioning Brock's conduct is ignored. Many notable studies of strategy, land and naval campaigns and battles, and the maritime economic war, by historians Rory Muir, Robin Reilly, Robert Malcomson, and Fay Kert, just to name a few, are absent, and the absence of the collection of naval documents published by the U.S. Naval Historical Centre is a significant omission.

The publication of this book coincided with the beginning of the bicentenary of the War of 1812, and like so many titles seeking a market share of this event, *Tecumseh and Brock* rides over heavily trodden territory and, despite the praise given it in several newspaper reviews, it offers little for serious students of the War of 1812.

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## *Redcoated Ploughboys*

The Volunteer Battalion of  
Incorporated Militia of Up-  
per Canada, 1813-1815

By Richard Feltoe

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2012. 432 pages, illustrations, 65 illustrations, 35 maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 paperback. ([www.dundurnpress.com](http://www.dundurnpress.com))

It was not until the conclusion of the war against Napoleon, in the spring of 1814, that Britain could reinforce its army in the Canadas to a level where it finally outnumbered the U.S. Army in size. Until then, British commanders in North America looked to the manpower resources of Upper and Lower Canada to augment their numbers. Unfortunately, inadequate training, discipline and equipment made the sedentary militia unsuitable for employment in the line, leaving the authorities to establish another type of militia organization, the incorporated or provincial unit, raised from volunteers who would serve for the duration of the conflict, and that

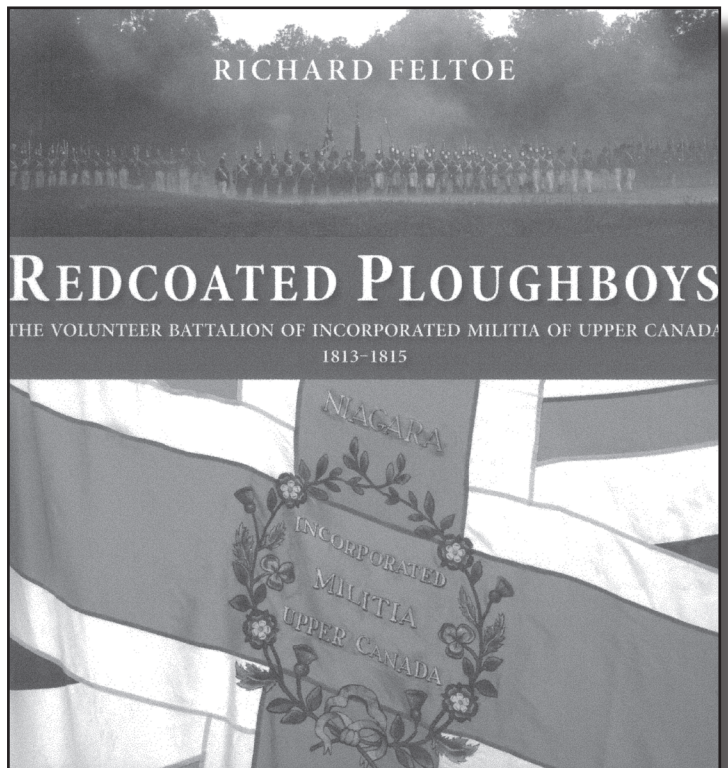
would be trained, armed and equipped like the regular troops. Between March and June 1813, the Upper Canada legislature approved the creation of several incorporated militia units, including the Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada—which fought in a number of actions, including Lundy's Lane and the siege of Fort George—and whose story is told in this book.

At first glance, *Redcoated Ploughboys* appears to be an impressive work. Closer examination, however, casts doubts on the quality of the research and presentation of the story. For example, the many original maps—there are 35 of them—throughout the book appear instructive and superior to any produced in years. Closer examination, however, reveals considerable licence was taken in the interpretation of the documentary record, and in assumptions made regarding unit movements. For example, the placement of the American and British pickets and the routes used by the two columns in the 24 August 1813 reconnaissance of Fort George cannot be reconciled with the general order issued the night before the operation was to take place, outlining the dispositions for the troops involved, and reports issued afterwards.

Before continuing, this reviewer acknowledges that the interpretation of source material and using conjecture, where gaps in the record warrant it, is central to the study of history and in the preparation of maps; however, this activity also requires a level of skill and discipline that was applied inconsistently during the preparation and editing of this book.

In another example, the author quotes a speech attributed to Lieutenant-Colonel William Robinson, commanding officer of the battalion, given to his men during the battle of Lundy's Lane. Not only does the speech not sound at all like what an officer would say, but also an examination of the original source, *Recollections of the American War* by William Dunlop, the surgeon of the 89th foot, reveals that Dunlop attributes this passage to "Billy R.," an NCO from the 8th Regiment of Foot who assisted in training the Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada at Fort Erie, and not to Robinson.

There are other problems in the book. Secretary of War John Armstrong, was responsible for the army, and did not implement "a massive capital investment and shipbuilding programme" at Sackets Harbor (p. 66); that activity was the purview of the Secretary of the Navy. Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, the Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of British North America, did not "install" (p. 124) Lieutenant-General Gordon Drummond as the commander of Upper Canada, or Brigadier-General Phineas Riall as the



commander of the Right Division. The British government assigned both officers to Upper Canada, and directed Prevost as to their employment. Commodore Sir James Yeo, commander on the Great Lakes, is mentioned in passing as "Yeo," but neither he, nor the arrival of the Royal Navy on the lakes, are introduced. The United States declared war on Great Britain on 18, not 19, June 1812, and the conditions leading to the end of hostilities, and the date it ended, are missing from the text.

Here is one final example. Never intended to be a major assault on the American defenders, the British reconnaissance of Fort George in August 1813 was purposely limited in scope to allow study of the American defences. Yet, the author presents it as a failed attack, attributable to the "overcautious command of this action"

by Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, who “lost an opportunity” (p. 119) to oust the Americans from the Niagara Peninsula by calling off the assault. This conclusion is not supported by the narrative, the sources cited, or the excerpt from a letter Prevost sent to his superior in London, which outlined the need for a larger coordinated operation, with naval support, to take Fort George, and Fort Niagara, which offered support from across the river.

There are a great many problems with *Redcoated Ploughboys*, yet, not all is lost, as historians, re-enactors and War of 1812

mavens alike will appreciate the many appendices offering details on the careers of select personnel, specifications of weapons, details on clothing and dress, and information on soldiering, discipline, diet, health and military families.

Unfortunately, careless research, imprecise writing and poor editing have dramatically reduced the quality of this work, which must be read with caution.

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## *The Idea of Popular Schooling in Upper Canada*

Print Culture, Public Discourse, and the Demand for Education

By Anthony Di Mascio

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012. 244 pages. \$95.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-773540-45-3. \$32.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-773540-46-0. ([www.mqup.ca](http://www.mqup.ca))

In approaching the subject of the development of education in Upper Canada, up to 1832, Anthony Di Mascio has chosen to focus on what he rightly claims is a neglected aspect, discussion of the subject by the people of the colony, through the press, in pamphlets and through other public forums such as petitions and debates in the two branches of the legislature. His argument is that public discussion helped to drive official policy. At times, what appeared to be actions initiated by leading figures in government were preceded by public pressure, exerted through newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, pamphlets, and possibly petitions.

As the author explains, much of the focus of historians of education has been on the period beginning in the 1840s, when Egerton Ryerson established the beginnings of the modern educational system. Discussions of the earlier period have focused largely on official policy and those who created it, but have neglected public pressure for development. The author has familiarized himself with various historians' views on the nature of Upper Canadian thinking on social issues and read the existing material on the development of education, but added to this a thorough reading of the newspapers, extant pamphlets of the period dealing with education, and