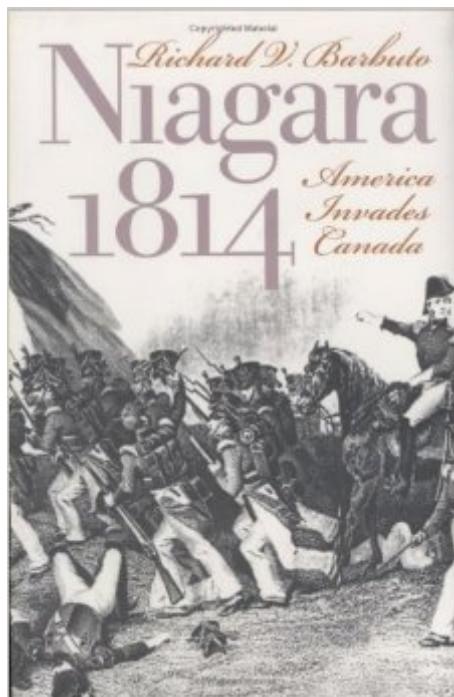


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Niagara 1814: America Invades Canada



Synopsis

Most books on the War of 1812 focus on the burning of Washington, D.C., the Battles of Baltimore and New Orleans, and the war in the Old Northwest. Scant attention, however, has been paid the Niagara Campaign of 1814—the American army's ambitious but failed attempt to wrest Canada from British control. While a few writers have dealt with aspects of this effort, Richard Barbuto is the first to offer a comprehensive study of the entire campaign. Barbuto covers every aspect of a campaign that saw the American army come of age, even as its military leaders blundered away potential victory and the acquisition of a coveted expanse of North American territory. Vividly recreating the major battles on the Niagara peninsula—“at Chippawa, Lundy’s Lane, Fort Erie, and Cook’s Mill”—Barbuto also clarifies the role of these engagements within the overall framework of American strategy. Despite early success at Chippawa, four long months of fighting finally ended in something like a draw, with the British still in control of Canada. Barbuto argues convincingly that the American government was never really able to harness, coordinate, and focus its tremendous resources in ways that would have allowed the campaign to succeed. Much of the blame, he shows, can be attributed to the poor leadership and confused strategic thinking of President James Madison and his secretary of war, John Armstrong. The American effort was further undermined by manpower shortages, a few ineffective field commanders, and the army and navy’s inability to coordinate their objectives and operations. Even so, Barbuto contends that the American soldier, led by the likes of Jacob Brown and the legendary Winfield Scott, performed surprisingly well against one of the great armies of the nineteenth century. Barbuto’s analysis, unmarred by national bias, presents a balanced picture of these events from the perspective of all participants—“American, British, Canadian, and Native American. He also fills an important gap by providing the first ever capsule histories of all regimental-sized units involved in the campaign. Breathing new life into these events, his far-ranging study should become the definitive work on this long-neglected campaign.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a reasonably well researched book on the 1814 Niagara campaign. It's good to see that the War of 1812 is finally beginning to receive some of the attention that the Revolution and the Civil War has always received in US History. Despite the reviews that state this is an unbiased account of the pivotal campaign fought on the Niagara Peninsula in 1814, I found Mr. Barbuto's account suffered from pro-American sentiments, even if they are more subtle than Elting's earlier work on the war. Barbuto's main thesis seems to be that the American militia gave a better account of itself in the war than most historians give them credit for. Is this a valid point? He cites the battle of Chippewa as one example where Porter's militia roughly handled the British-lead Indians and Canadian Militia, but even still the US Militia broke when confronted by Pearson's Light companies. Scott had to use Jesup's 25th Infantry to cover his left flank during the battle after Porter's militia were streaming to the rear. Granted, the militia did better here, but they still could not stand up to regulars. At Lundy's Lane Porter's 300 odd men from his brigade gave a pretty good account of themselves, but they were defending, always easier for militia to do, and in the end along with the rest of the US army they retired from the field giving Drummond's battered British regulars a hard fought victory. Under Gaines at the sortie of Fort Erie the Militia did manage to overrun some British gun emplacements, but the battle becomes a confused affair in the rain, and the British reserves from the 6th & 82nd foot shatter the American militia with heavy volleys as they mill around in the captured British works.

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