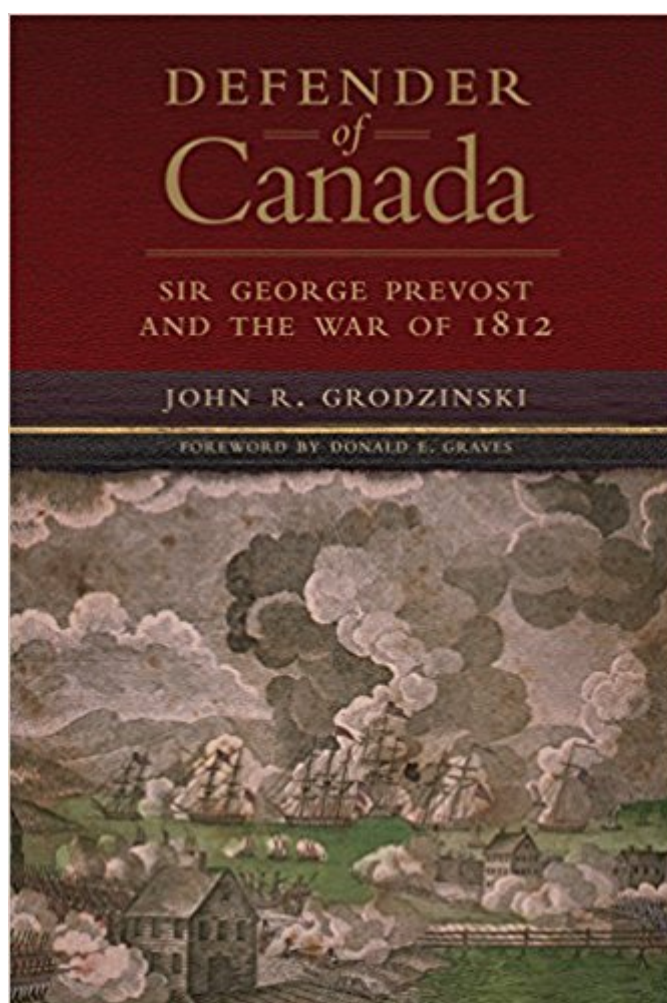


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Defender Of Canada: Sir George Prevost And The War Of 1812 (Campaigns And Commanders Series)



Synopsis

When war broke out between Great Britain and the United States in 1812, Sir George Prevost, captain general and governor in chief of British North America, was responsible for defending a group of North American colonies that stretched as far as the distance from Paris to Moscow. He also commanded one of the largest British overseas forces during the Napoleonic Wars. *Defender of Canada*, the first book-length examination of Prevost's career, offers a reinterpretation of the general's military leadership in the War of 1812. Historian John R. Grodzinski shows that Prevost deserves far greater credit for the successful defense of Canada than he has heretofore received. Earlier accounts portrayed Prevost as overly cautious and attributed the preservation of Canada to other officers, but Grodzinski challenges these assumptions and restores the general to his rightful place as British North America's key military figure during the War of 1812. Grodzinski shows that Prevost's strategic insight enabled him to enact a practicable defense despite scarce resources and to ably integrate naval power into his defensive plans. Prevost's range of responsibilities in British North America were daunting. They included overseeing joint endeavors with Indian allies, managing logistical matters, monitoring naval construction and personnel needs, supervising colonial governments, and commanding the defense of Canada. Tasked with protecting an extensive and complex territory, Prevost employed a mix of soldiers, sailors, locally raised forces, and indigenous people in taking advantage of the American military's weaknesses to defeat most of its plans. Following his recall to Britain in 1815 after the defeat at the Battle of Plattsburgh, Prevost would have been court-martialed had he not died unexpectedly. In carefully examining the charges leveled against Prevost, Grodzinski shows the general to have preserved the integrity of Canada, allowing diplomats to ensure its continued existence.

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Customer Reviews

“Prevost’s role as governor general of Canada has long been diminished or underestimated.

In this well-written, thoroughly researched account, John R. Grodzinski successfully restores

Prevost to his rightful place as British North America’s key military figure during the War of

1812.” • John H. Schroeder, author of *Commodore John Rodgers: Paragon of the Early American*

Navy “This full-dress study and reassessment of Sir George Prevost is long overdue. John R.

Grodzinski does a masterful job of tracing Prevost’s career and demonstrates that this

much-maligned leader deserves to be remembered as the savior of Canada.” • Donald R. Hickey,

author of *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* “Sir George Prevost has had many critics and

almost no defenders. In the course of rehabilitating Prevost’s reputation, John R. Grodzinski

gives us a fresh, comprehensive analysis of British strategy and policy-making in North America,

1811 to 1815. This book will stand as one of the more significant studies to emerge from the

bicentennial of the War of 1812.” • J. C. A. Stagg, author of *The War of 1812: Conflict for a*

Continent “In a major contribution to scholarship, John R. Grodzinski shifts the focus from the

drama and glory of battles and campaigns to the higher direction of war. His focus on the combined

civil-military command that defeated a succession of American invasions places Sir George Prevost

in the wider context of imperial power, and makes a strong case in Prevost’s

defense.” • Andrew Lambert, author of *The Challenge: Britain against America in the Naval War of*

1812

John R. Grodzinski is Assistant Professor of History at Royal Military College of Canada and editor

of the on-line War of 1812 Magazine. He is the author of *The War of 1812: An Annotated*

Bibliography (Routledge, 2007) and *Defender of Canada: Sir George Prevost and the War of 1812*

(OU Press, 2013). Military historian Donald E. Graves is the author of several books, including most

recently *Dragon Rampant: The Royal Welch Fusiliers at War, 1793–1815*.

This book is a well researched balanced history of the role of Lieutenant General Sir George

Prevost as the governor general and commander in chief of British North America during the War of

1812. Grodzinski is well qualified to write this book as he did his PhD on Prevost. Prevost has been heavily criticized by many for some of his actions or lack of action, but Grodzinski explores these issues with a depth of research and fair mindedness that is impressive. The only part that I disagree is that much more emphasis should be on the weakness of the United States as the main reason the U.S. was unsuccessful in its military operations and less on the leader of British North America.

As with most folks in the United States, my previous knowledge of the War of 1812 did not extend past the burning of Washington and the Battle of New Orleans. This book is a good narrative on the war in the north. It also gives recognition to the individual most critical to the retention of Canada by Great Britain.

DEFENDER OF CANADA: SIR GEORGE PREVOST AND THE WAR OF 1812 JOHN R.

GRODZINSKI UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS, 2013 HARDCOVER, \$34.95, 360 PAGES, ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, TABLES, APPENDICES, NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX

Sir George Prevost was born at Hackensack, New Jersey, under the British flag on 19 May 1767. He was raised in Britain and attended the Lochee Academy in London and then another military academy in Colmar, France. Prevost received his first commission in the 60th Regiment of Foot in the British Army. After transfers back and forth, he was severely wounded at St. Vincent's and went to England to recover. On 1 January 1798, he was promoted to colonel and then to brigadier general on 8 March 1798. At the same time of his promotion, he was nominated as military governor of St. Lucia but ill health caused him to return to England. He was made a baronet in 1805 and promoted to major general later. In 1808, Prevost was promoted to lieutenant general and in 1811, he was made lieutenant governor of Lower Canada and appointed as commander-in-chief in Nova Scotia. The prospect of war was viewed with apprehension by the population north of the St. Lawrence River. They were in a weak position and they knew it. Few British regular troops were available for the defense (Great Britain was heavily engaged against Napoleon in Europe at this time) and the militia was too few in number, and in some cases too unreliable, to defend successfully a frontier extending from Maine to Michigan. Sir George Prevost therefore felt that the best strategy he could adopt would be to concentrate his principal strength in Lower Canada, leaving the outer fringes of the country to get along as best they could. He believed that Upper Canada, particularly the western counties, were too remote and too vulnerable to be defended, particularly in light of the fact that these regions had been settled, in large extent, by Americans who had come to Canada, not because of their political convictions, but in search of cheap land. "Late Loyalists" they were

derisively termed by the real Canadians. Because the Americans chose to attack in the Detroit and Niagara frontiers, Prevost had therefore to arrange to forward the necessary supplies up the St. Lawrence River from Montreal to Kingston which, throughout the whole of the war, served as the main British supply depot in Upper Canada. From Kingston, there was easy water communication to the western regions of the province, and to Kingston there was the traditional water route from Montreal. The St. Lawrence River thus became, during the War of 1812, the life-line of Canada. The successful defense of the province would depend upon the securing of complete control of this water route. Without that control, Kingston and Upper Canada could be strangled by the enemy. By the same token, if the Americans were to emerge victorious from the war, then it was essential that they should seize control of what the French had called the Great River of Canada.

DEFENDER OF CANADA: SIR GEORGE PREVOST AND THE WAR OF 1812 for the first time re-examines the traditional view of this extremely competent administrator whose preparations for defending Upper and Lower Canada with limited means at his disposal was energetic, well conceived, and comprehensive. In spite of the most taxing, hazardous circumstances and difficult terrain, Prevost achieved the primary objective of preventing an American conquest. Author John R. Grodzinski shows this key figure of the War of 1812 may not have been a successful commander of field operations but his military reputation could have stood higher had his exploits been compared not to those of Wellington but to those of the opposing American generals.

Colonel Robert A. Lynn, Florida Guard
Orlando, Florida

A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com: 'Prevost, who had an impressive career in the British Army and as a colonial administrator, has been treated poorly by historians for his years as commander-in-chief in British North America (1811-1812). In this comprehensive biography, Prof. Grodzinski (Royal Military College of Canada) does a very good job of rescuing the man's reputation, which rests largely on the failure of his invasion of New York in 1814. Grodzinski opens with a review of Prevost's early career up to his appointment to command in Canada. He then delves deeply into Prevost's actions in Canada. Grodzinski devotes an entire chapter to preparations for war, reviewing the strategic picture, the resources available, and Prevost's operational planning. The events of 1812 and 1813 are covered in three chapters, culminating in the repulse of a broad front American invasion. Two chapters cover the strategic situation at the onset of 1814 and preparations for the invasion of New York. The campaign itself, which culminated in the twin battles of Plattsburg and Lake Champlain are covered in detail in one chapter. There follows an account of the court martial proceedings against Prevost, which almost

destroyed his reputation, and some reflections on the man's leadership during the War of 1812. With its very useful appendices that include important letters and other documents, Defender of Canada is not only an excellent biography of an underrated commander, but also an essential read for anyone interested in the War of 1812. For the full review, see StrategyPage.Com

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