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Red Coats & Grey Jackets: The Battle of Chippawa, 5 July 1814 by Donald E. Graves [Review]

George Sheppard

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rolling, gunwale under...the swinging lamp touched the ceiling planks. Away went seats, Soup, Mutton, dumplings, crockery, knives, forks, Mustard Pepper, Sauces....The Lady screamed...the Gentlemen shouted....All our chairs were broken, our table cloths cut, the Cook ill or sulky-obliged to cook for ourselves and to prepare our own Meals. Nor was this the worst, the rascal Sailors stole a considerable portion of our stock as we discovered. However, Merry hearts make light days!" (p.59) This last phrase became Lieutenant John Le Couteur's credo which he managed to maintain pretty consistently throughout his service in British North America during the War.

He was born on the Island of Jersey into a military family, fortunately, one that kept written records. *Merry Hearts* covers Le Couteur's life from his earliest memories through his boyhood military education and his periods of army service in British North America from June 1812 until December 1815 and again from 1816 to 1817. This journal was worked on in later life by Le Couteur who based it on a daily diary, memory, correspondence, official documents and his mother's diary. As well, correspondence is inserted (e.g. chapters 12, 14) and the account in chapter 4 of the winter march of Le Couteurs' regiment, the 104th Foot, from New Brunswick to Upper Canada in 1813, is taken from a text published in the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* rather than from the draft in Le Couteur's papers. In short, this publication originates not from a single document but from several sources.

Le Couteur joined his regiment in Saint John, New Brunswick in June 1812, marched with it to Upper Canada and served there until February 1815. He participated in the raid on Sackets Harbor, the battle of Lundy's Lane, the skirmish at

Conjocta Creek, the seige of Fort Erie including the assault of 15 August 1814, and the clash at Cook's Mills; he also witnessed the surrender of the Americans at Beaver Dams. His first-hand accounts of these actions, particularly at Sackets Harbor, Lundy's Lane and Fort Erie, convey the immediacy of battle but just as interesting are his reflections on leadership, his own emotions and the suffering of the men.

In the editor's words, "Le Couteur's war was a subaltern's war and a light infantryman's war," and so we see his experience "from the viewpoint of a junior officer." (p.18) rather than from that of field or high command. Being a well-born and well-educated officer, Le Couteur was able to move in the highest colonial civil and military circles, frequently attending balls and parties as well as occasionally dining with commanding officers from the army and navy, but he was not privy to higher military decisions nor informed about overall strategy. Although the journal provides snapshots of the hard life of the rank and file trooper, what it also makes clear—explicitly and implicitly—is the social chasm between officer and soldier. In short, this journal is a social document and not simply an account of military life and adventures.

Carleton University Press is to be congratulated for this first full publication of the journal, edited and with notes by Donald Graves, arguably the leading scholar currently writing about the War of 1812. He provides an informative Introduction and a profusion of endnotes which, among other things, explain the meanings of military terms and obscure words of the period, the cost of living, civilian and military income, literary allusions and the identities of many individuals. The well chosen illustrations include early nineteenth-century views of places where Le Couteur

served as well as some of his watercolours and sketches. The book's detailed bibliography and index give it the full range of scholarly apparatus which makes the absence of maps all the more surprising.

While *Merry Hearts* may be read as an exciting story of a young man risking his life far from home, it is much more. Besides students of the War of 1812 or of Canadian military history, the journal should interest a wider readership because it presents so many insights into other areas like the functioning of the British military in that period, military-civilian relationships, and pioneer conditions in Upper Canada.

Wesley B. Turner
Brock University

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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

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A Legacy of Courage

Fred Bagley and Dr. Harvey Daniel Duncan. *A Legacy of Courage: Calgary's Own 137th Overseas Battalion, CEF*. Calgary: Pulp Street Books, 1994. 247 pages, \$19.95.

This account of Calgary's 137th battalion is a reasonably solid work detailing the formation of the battalion in November 1915 until its return to Canada in 1919. The 975 men who made up the battalion were primarily labourers and farmers from southern Alberta. The book traces the training of the battalion at Sarcee Camp and in England, describing the partial dismemberment of the battalion in August 1916 with elements of the 137th being sent to France. Through two years of fighting, 179 men of the 137th were killed, and 392 wounded, which translates into a 60 per cent casualty rate for the battalion.

The text is divided into three sections. Part I, the weakest portion of the book, provides an historical overview of the entire Canadian contribution to the Allied effort throughout the First World War. Part II, by far the strongest part of the text, is based on the diaries of one the principle authors, Dr. Harvey Duncan, who served as a private in the battalion. Bagley integrates the memoirs of the young 20-year-old Duncan into the text, and this provides a fresh and realistic account of his experiences from the time of his enlistment in 1916 until his return to Canada in 1919. Through his writings, the reader can share in Duncan's initial fear at Vimy Ridge in April 1917, then his, and the battalion's sense of accomplishment following the Canadian victory. The reader also shares in Duncan's sense of disillusionment following his participation at Passchendaele, where the battalion suffered heavy casualties, among them Duncan who was wounded by mortar fire.

The final section of the book documents the efforts by some members of the battalion to organize annual reunions of battalion survivors, the strong involvement of the battalion in community projects, and the