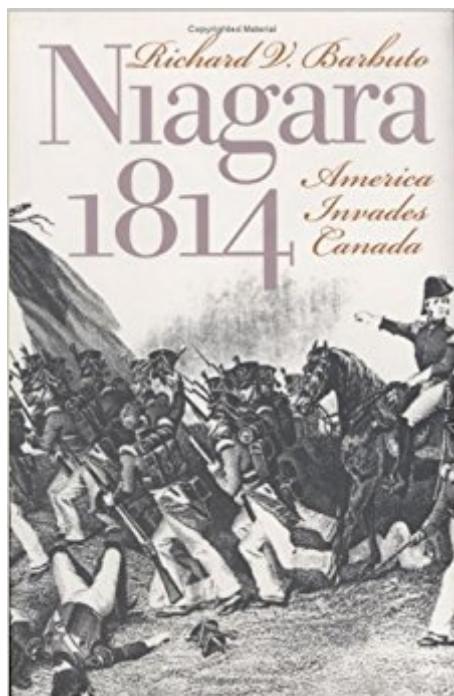


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Niagara 1814: America Invades Canada



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—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.

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Customer Reviews

"An impressive and important addition to the historical works on the War of 1812. Comprehensive in scope and detailed in its analysis, Barbuto's study is also a sheer pleasure to read and will most certainly become the standard work on the subject."--Timothy D. Johnson, author of *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* "Barbuto makes an original and valuable contribution to our understanding of the War of 1812. His study is unmatched for its comprehensiveness and balance and should be welcomed by scholars and general readers with a strong interest in good military history."--William Skelton, author of *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861*

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The book, like almost all military history books overwhelms the reader with reactions of officers in regard to the myriad of activities retrieved from the comments of officers alone. It's hard to get a picture of what happened during the battles. The other materiel reads well

Exhaustively researched and artfully written, Barbuto's book should be considered the standard by which all contemporary works on the subject are judged. Barbuto examines the Niagara campaign at the tactical, operational and strategic levels and examines why the America's last invasion of

Canada failed, despite the often superb performance of General Brown's hard charging brigades. Barbuto neither asserts nor implies, as one reviewer erroneously claims, that the accompanying American militia could meet and defeat British regulars in pitched battle. Nor is his account any more partisan or blinded by nationalistic chauvinism than Donald Graves' excellent accounts. Alternatively, Barbuto does argue that Brown's American regulars had achieved tactical parity with British regulars. Here the author is on solid historical footing. Brown's regulars met and defeated a numerically equal force of British professionals on open ground south of the Chippewa River, in arguably the most evenly matched contest of the entire war. Later, at Lundy's Lane, the Americans drove British troops from the high ground above the sunken lane and successfully repulsed several enemy counterattacks. Such an assertion, moreover, is scarcely controversial. Indeed, as British historian Matthew Spring acknowledges, by the end of the American War for Independence that the best of the Continental Army could meet the Crown's forces on more or less equal terms.

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 the 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. The fighting also took place in broken ground and was not a stand up fight, also more favorable circumstances for US militia. These facts are not mentioned in Barbuto's work.

The American militia can do adequately when properly lead, but even on these occasions they really can't stand up to British regulars, as much as Mr. Barbuto would like to make us think they could. The book spends a lot of time going over the first two years of the war. I thought a bit too much time was used covering this background information which can be found in many of the other general histories on this conflict. Also, the author repeated information in this background study. The main strength of this work is the operational perspective it provides on the Niagara campaign. Barbuto's work is basically a study of the campaign's background, preparation and execution. As such it succeeds adequately. But those seeking a more detailed description on the major battles of Chippewa, Lundy's Lane and Fort Erie should read Donald Grave's work on these subjects. Where Mr. Barbuto excels is in his analysis of the battles and how they shaped the 1814 campaign. He provides cogent reasons for why certain decisions were made, and how they influenced events. This to me is the main strength of this book, which sets it apart from the general histories of the conflict. Barbuto gives too much attention trying to prove that the American army was the equal to the British after Scott's intensive training. Again, the only clear-cut victory of the campaign in the open is at Chippewa, where Scott's splendid brigade bests the British in a fair firefight. At Fort Erie they do heavily repulse the British assault, but this is not a fair fight in the open. Fortunately Barbuto does not make the twin mistakes of claiming the British attacked in column or that they were routed at Chippewa. At Lundy's Lane the Americans fought hard, but in the end they retreated and give up the guns they captured from the British. Even at Fort Erie where Gaine's sortie makes initial progress, the attack bogs down and the British repulse the attack. Given these circumstances it is difficult to support Mr. Barbuto's claim that after Chippewa American regulars and militia never gave ground again. In this regard the author allows his nationalism to unbalance his perspective somewhat. Despite these drawbacks, this is still a worthwhile overview of the 1814 campaign. There is a lot of information about US regiments and leaders, while somewhat less on British units and their commanders. The perspective is mostly seen from the American side, with some attempts to describe what the British were doing. Probably for the most detailed and non-biased accounts of the battles of 1814 Donald Graves remains the best, but Barbuto has made a worthwhile effort. It would be nice if he or another author might do the same analysis on the 1812 or 1813 campaigns, but few American historians want to study this embarrassing aspect of the war in any depth! Can we blame them! Definitely a good buy for War of 1812 fans if the slight pro-American bias is taken into account.

I found Mr Barbuto's book well written and very easy reading. He not only covers the personalities

and strategies of the 1814 campaign but also reviews each engagement from both British and American points of very, opportunities lost, blunders as well as succesful strategies and places all in the context of the personalities involved. The only shortfall may be a little slowness to the beginning of the book as Mr Barbuto sets the stage and puts the action in context.

I can't rate this book because I haven't read it. However, in your introduction you state that Richard Barbuto is the first to write a comprehensive history of the War of 1812, which -- unless you really mean the first American writer to do so -- is not true. Pierre Berton, Canada's best-known writer of history, wrote a two-volume, comprehensive history of the war some 15-20 years ago. And he was resolutely neutral in his approach to the subject -- Mr. Barbuto would certainly have read that work in the course of his research and would probably agree with me. I know that Pierre Berton approached a number of U.S. publishers after his work became a best seller in Canada. All turned him down because, they said, it did not take an American point of view; it was too neutral. I'm not in any way trying to demean Mr. Barbuto or his work, just remind my American neighbors once again that we're part of this continent, too. We share with you both its history and the experience of living here. When we write about that experience, as we frequently do (and do so capably and conscientiously) we deserve to have our efforts recognized, even if your own book publishers don't think you'll appreciate our point of view. Sincerely, Jerry Lawton

RICH BARBUTO IS MY DAD. HE GAVE ME A COPY OF HIS BOOK FOR ONE OF MY SCHOOL BOOK REPORTS. THE FIRST SEVEN CHAPTERS PUT ME TO SLEEP. BUT AFTER THAT I COOULDNT PUT IT DOWN. AS ONE OF THE PUBLISHER'S REVIEWERS SAID " ANY PERSON INTERESTED IN THE WAR OF 1812 OR ANY MILITARY HISTORY REALLY SHOULD READ IT. IT WAS RATHER LONG FOR AGE, BUT I REALLY LOVED IT. A.F. BARBUTO

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