"The Finest Army Ever to Campaign on American Soil"?

The Organization, Strength, Composition, and Losses of British Land Forces during the Plattsburgh Campaign, September, 1814

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On 1 September 1814, a British army under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost crossed the international border near Champlain, New York, and moved south up the Lake Champlain valley toward the small town of Plattsburgh. Twelve days later, following the destruction of its attendant naval squadron at that place, this same army was in full retreat back to its starting point and the major British offensive of the War of 1812 came to an abrupt end. The victory on Lake Champlain in September 1814 and its results were justly celebrated by Americans at the time but, in later years, particularly in the 19th century, some mythological weeds sprouted up around the British force that so ignominiously withdrew across the border less than two weeks after it had set out to bring Cousin Jonathan to his knees.

Among these accretions are claims that Prevost's force was far stronger than it actually was; that it was composed almost entirely of veteran troops from Wellington's army; and that it was so disheartened during its withdrawal that hundreds — if not thousands — of these same veterans deserted the Colours rather than return to Canada. What I propose to do is take a closer look at this force, which one American has termed "the finest army ever to campaign on American soil," in an attempt to clear away some of the mythology that has grown up around it.[1]

British Strength at Plattsburgh

Historians' estimates of Prevost's strength at Plattsburgh generally range from 10,000 to 15,000 troops. Among recent American writers, the figures vary from those of Robert Quimby, who calculated it at 10,351, up through John K. Mahon who placed it at just under 12,000, to Harry Coles who believed Prevost had no less than 15,000 "hard-muscled" regulars (and how could he be so certain about the state of their physique?).[2] Three Canadian historians who have recently written on the 1814 campaign display a remarkable unanimity with Quimby that the British general had precisely 10,351 officers and men.[3]

Quimby and the three Canadians base this figure on the total strength figure listed in a "Weekly State of the Left Division under the Command of Major General de Rottenburg." dated "Headquarters Platsburg [sic] 6th September 1814."[4] This document, and a similar return dated 15 September 1814 at Odelltown, Lower Canada, are often overlooked by researchers because they are not located in the main British military records collection (Record Group 8 I) in the Library

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[1] Harry M. Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago, 1965), 167. In fairness to Mr. Coles the author repeated this phrase in his book, *Where Right and Glory Lead: The Battle of Lundy's Lane, 1814* (Toronto, 1997), 224.

[2] Robert S. Quimby, *The U.S. Army in the War of 1812. An Operational and Command Study* (2 vols, East Lansing, 1997), II, 598-599; John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville, 1972), 318-319; Coles, *War of 1812*, 167.

[3] J.M. Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto, 1999), 254, Wesley Turner, *British Generals in the War of 1812: High Command in the Canadas* (Montreal, 1999), 47; G.F.G. Stanley, *The War of 1812* (Ottawa, 1983), 344.

[4] Library and Archives Canada, Colonial Office 42, vol 131, Prevost to Bathurst, 1 April 1815. Although Major General Francis De Rottenburg was the nominal commander of the British army that invaded northern New York in September 1814 — the actual commander was Sir George Prevost.

and Archives of Canada but in the Colonial Office 42 records which contain the correspondence of Prevost with his immediate superior, Lord Bathurst, the colonial secretary in London. As the covering letter dated 1 April 1815, to which the two returns were appended, indicates they were compiled at Bathurst's request and this was possibly one of Prevost's last official acts as commander-in-chief of British North America as he was relieved two days later by Lieutenant-General Sir Gordon Drummond. At first glance, therefore, these two returns would seem to be solid and accurate evidence of the strength of the British army at the battle of Plattsburgh. The devil, however, is often found in the details and a closer examination of the most relevant return, that of 6 September, reveals some interesting facts.[5]

Prevost's army comprised three brigades of infantry, a strong force of Royal Artillery, and a regiment of cavalry. We are mostly concerned with the main arm, the infantry, and the return shows that, on 6 September 1814, Prevost had under his command 14 battalions of infantry organized in three brigades:

Table 1: The Infantry Organization of Prevost's Army, September 1814

1st Brigade		Major General Frederick P. Robinson
	3/27th Foot	
	1/39th Foot	
	76th Foot	
	1/88th Foot	
2nd Brigade		Major General Thomas Brisbane
	2/8th Foot	
	13th Foot	
	49th Foot	
	De Meuron's Regiment	
	Canadian Voltigeurs	
	Canadian Chasseurs	
3rd Brigade		Major General Manley Power
	1/3rd Foot	
	1/5th Foot	
	1/27th Foot	
	1/58th Foot	

His mounted troops consisted of two squadrons of the 19th Light Dragoons. His artillery, latterly under the command of Major John S. Sinclair, RA, comprised Sinclair's own Royal Artillery company and the companies of Captains Peter M. Wallace and S. Maxwell, as well as a detachment from Captain James Addams's company. Sinclair also commanded elements of the Provincial Royal Artillery Drivers who provided the horse teams to draw the guns. The artillery was organized in three field brigades (or batteries), each with five 6-pdr. guns and a 5.5-inch howitzer. A "division," or half of one of the field brigades, was left at Chazy, NY, for the security of that post so only two and a half brigades with 15 pieces of ordnance reached

[5] The two returns are appended to Library and Archives Canada, CO 42, vol 131, Prevost to Bathurst, 1 April 1815, 163, 165.

Plattsburgh. Sinclair also commanded a separate train of artillery with two 24-pdr. brass field guns, an 8-inch brass howitzer, and three 24-pdr. naval carronades mounted on field carriages. This train was later augmented by two 12-pdr. iron guns and two 8-inch iron mortars taken from the British post at Isle au Noix, although these weapons never saw action during the battle of 11 September.[6] Finally, Sinclair had a Congreve rocket detachment, manned either by gunners from the Royal Artillery or, more likely, a detachment of the Royal Marine Artillery (his report is not clear on the subject). Therefore, Prevost had a total of 24 artillery pieces available on 11 September, the day of the battle, although not all of them would see action.[7]

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the two 12-pdr. iron guns ("the only heavy Guns we had" in Sinclair's opinion), none of the British artillery weapons could be classified as siege ordnance. The two 24-pdr. brass field guns were light, experimental pieces cast during the Seven Years' War which had first been sent to North America as part of the armament for Burgoyne's ill-fated 1777 expedition. They had not been used in that operation but had remained in store until 1814 when a section of two pieces was put into service in the Niagara and a second section accompanied the army to Plattsburgh.

These 24-pdr. guns were hybrid weapons, supposedly able to function as both field and siege artillery, but like most hybrid weapons, were not very effective in either role. British gunners disliked using them as field pieces because they were heavier than the standard 6-pdr. field gun, requiring additional horses to draw them (and thus more forage) while the weight of their projectiles meant that less ready-use ammunition could be carried on the gun and its limber and therefore additional vehicles had to accompany the piece to transport its ammunition, requiring more horses and forage. On the other hand, the 24-pdrs. were not very useful as siege pieces because the short length of their tubes gave them a lower muzzle velocity that reduced their penetration power against earthworks. The relatively light nature of Prevost's ordnance meant that he would have to rely on Captain Robert Downie's Royal Navy squadron to provide, if necessary, the heavy firepower to attack the defences of Plattsburgh. In the event, naval gunfire was not available.[8]

To return to the infantry, the return of 6 September is broken down by the standard British method of separate figures for officers, sergeants, drummers, and "rank and file" (privates and corporals). For a brigade or regimental commander, the most important figure was that for the "rank and file," or those troops who stood in the firing line in action (officers, sergeants and drummers were not positioned in the firing line). Allowing two feet or so of breadth per man for each man of the "rank and file," this figure informed the commander how much ground he could cover in action, depending on whether he formed in two or three ranks. For this reason British returns listed "rank and file" strength as a separate item. On 6 September 1814, Prevost's infantry consisted of 373 officers, 570 sergeants, 206 drummers and 8,389 "rank and file" for a total of 10,038 officers and men.

From these figures, however, deductions must be made. First, the number of men on the

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[6] Library and Archives Canada, Colonial Office 42, vol 131, Sinclair to Baynes, 20 March 1815.

[7] M.E.S. Laws, *Battery Records of the Royal Artillery* (Woolwich, 1952), 158-160; Library and Archives Canada, CO 42, vol 131, 162, Sinclair to Baynes, 20 March 1815.

[8] Information on the artillery component of Prevost's army comes from another document appended to the two returns, the report of Major John Sinclair to the Adjutant-General Baynes, dated 20 March 1815. For the brass 24-pdr. guns, see B.P. Hughes, *British Smooth-Bore Artillery* (London, 1969), 18-19; William Dunlop, *Tiger Dunlop's Upper Canada* (Ottawa, 1967), 40.

sick list must be taken away and, although the return of 6 September does not include figures for officers, it shows 135 enlisted as unable to perform their duties on 6 September 1814 because of sickness. This is a remarkably low figure considering that Major General Jacob Brown of the American army reckoned that, during the War of 1812, even a healthy army would have one-eighth of its men on sick parade while campaigning in the northern theatre— and Brown had the experience to make such a statement.[9] The low rate of sickness can possibly be attributed to the fact that, immediately prior to the campaign, Prevost's troops had been rested in a relatively healthy area (the fertile plains around St. Jean, Lower Canada) and the operation itself had been underway for less than a week.

The second deduction that must be made is for those officers and men "on command," or detached from their brigades and regiments. The phrase "on command," used in British returns of the period, is sometimes susceptible to confusion because it includes everything from the small detachments made for baggage parties, rear parties, escorts, prisoner guards—which were (and still are) the bane of a unit commander's life—to entire units detached from their parent brigades.

Of the 14 infantry battalions in the army, the 6 September return lists 13 battalions as having officers and men "on command." In nine of these units, the average number of "rank and file" so detached was 16 men—clearly small parties—but, in four battalions, the numbers "on command" were much larger. From Robinson's 1st Brigade, only 60 "rank and file" each from the 1/39th and 1/88th Foot were present under arms at Plattsburg on 6 September, the remainder being listed as "on command." The fact that these units had been detached is confirmed by Robinson's own journal of the campaign which states that the 39th and 88th Foot were left on the lines of communication duties at Chazy and Champlain, NY, and only their light infantry companies were present with the main army. In fact, after these units were detached, Robinson tends to refer to his command in his journal as a "demi" or half brigade. From Brisbane's 2nd Brigade, one-third of the 49th Foot and one half of De Meuron's Regiment were not at Plattsburg on 6 September.[10]

Taking all this into consideration, and deducting the figures for the sick and "on command," the strength of Prevost's army present and fit for duty at Plattsburg on 6 September was 8,072 officers and men broken down as follows:

Table 2: The Strength of the British Army at Plattsburgh

Formation	Unit	Officers	Other Ranks
Infantry	1st Brigade	66	1158
	2nd Brigade	149	2829
	3rd Brigade	129	2973
Artillery		18	472
Cavalry		14	264
	Totals	376	7696

[9] U.S. National Archives, RG 107, Micro 221, reel 59, Brown to Armstrong, 17 April 1814.

[10] Return of 6 September 1814 in CO 42. Journal of Major General Robinson, Massey Library, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston.

These figures would not have changed substantially when the battle was fought on 11 September as the four units "on command" remained so and it is doubtful that the number of sick increased appreciably over a period of five days.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that the present author is not the only historian to arrive at a lower figure for the strength of the British army at Plattsburgh than that generally stated. Allan Everest, in his *The War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley*, one of the finest single studies of the Plattsburgh campaign, made many of the same deductions noted above to arrive at a figure of 8,200 officers and men.[11]

The Composition of the Army -- Were they All Wellington's "Invincibles"?

As Everest points out, however, a "reduction in the traditional size of the British force does not materially lessen their overwhelming preponderance" compared to the American defenders as Prevost's troops "were largely Napoleonic war veterans under experienced officers."[12] Veterans they may well have been but were they—as popular myth would have it—veterans of Wellington's famous army?

Recent research has demonstrated that, between the end of the war in Europe in April 1814 and the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814, Britain dispatched 33 infantry battalions, 10 artillery companies and one cavalry regiment to North America, about 28,000 troops. Of these 44 units, 21 came from the Peninsula army and, of the Peninsular units, 12 came to Lower Canada (3 artillery companies and 9 infantry battalions).[13]

It might be expected that Prevost would have utilized these 9 battalions to carry out his operation on Lake Champlain—the major British offensive of the War of 1812—but, in fact, only 6 of the 14 battalions in the Plattsburgh invasion force were Peninsular units. Robinson's 1st Brigade was composed entirely of these troops while Power's 3rd Brigade had two Peninsular battalions (1/3rd and 1/5th Foot) and two non-Peninsular units: the 1/27th Foot and the 1/58th which came from Lieutenant-General William Bentinck's "East Coast" army in Spain. Brisbane's 2nd Brigade was composed entirely of British units that had been serving in North America for some time or Canadian units. Finally, as has been pointed out above, only the light companies of two Peninsular units, the 39th and 88th Foot, ever reached Plattsburgh during the campaign. None of the four artillery companies or part companies under Sinclair's command were from the Peninsula nor was Prevost's sole cavalry regiment, the 19th Light Dragoons.

Extrapolating from the figures in the return of 6 September 1814, therefore, only 2,625 (or 32.5%) of the 8,072 officers and men reported fit for duty that day were Peninsula veterans. Their unit breakdown is as follows:

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[11] Allan Everest, *The War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley* (Syracuse, 1981), 167. The fact that two historians, using the same document, can come to differing strength figures is explained by the fact that Everest did not deduct the figures for the sick.

[12] Everest, *War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley*, 167.

[13] For details on British reinforcements sent to North America in 1814, see this author's article, "The Redcoats are Coming: British Troop Movements to North America in 1814," *Journal of the War of 1812*, 6 (No. 3, Summer 2001), 12-18.

Table 3: Strength of Peninsula Units at Plattsburgh, 1814

1/3rd Foot	709
1/5th Foot	705
3/27th Foot	502
1/39th Foot	66
76th Foot	579
1/88th Foot	67
Total	2,625

British Losses during the Plattsburgh Campaign

When turning to the question of losses suffered during the campaign, the matter is much less clear. This is because a new document, compiled on 14 September 1814, must be taken into consideration as well as the returns for 6 and 15 September. This document is a "Return of the Killed Wounded and Missing of the Left Division ... from the 6th to the 14th September 1814, Inclusive" which was appended to Prevost's official report on the battle, which he dated 11 September. It states that 37 men were killed, 150 wounded and 55 went missing between 6 and 14 September.[14]

This document, however, was compiled within a few days of the end of the campaign before an accurate accounting of all casualties was available—many of those it lists as being wounded on 11 September would later have died. It is also notable that, in contrast to the other two returns, which break down the "missing" category into those taken prisoner and those who deserted, this document simply lists them as "missing"—reason unspecified.

On balance, because they were prepared six months later when more reliable information was available, the returns for 6 and 15 September can safely be regarded as more accurate. They list the following casualty statistics:

Table 4: British Losses, September 1814

Return	Killed	Wounded	Prisoner	Deserted
6 Sept 1814	14	94	2	5
15 Sept 1814	33	127	68	234
Totals	47	221	70	239

Some comment should be made here about the period covered by these two returns. That for 6 September 1814 notes that the casualty figures are those "since the last return" and, since the British army was mustered and paid on the 25th of every month, the two returns thus cover the period, 25 August to 15 September 1814, or the duration of the Plattsburgh campaign. In sum, therefore, Prevost suffered 577 losses of all types during those three weeks, or 5.6% of the army he led across the international border.[15]

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[14] Library and Archives of Canada, CO 42, vol 128-1, Prevost to Bathurst, 11 September 1814, with return dated 14 September appended.

[15] Note that this figure for the percentage of casualties has been extrapolated, not from the strength at Plattsburgh on 6 September

When contemplating Table 4, the figure for desertion immediately attracts the eye. Much has been made of the high rate of desertion in Prevost's army during the retreat back to Canada and the implication has been made that the prime culprits were the Peninsula veterans who, disgusted with poor leadership of a "colonial" general, took the opportunity to undergo instant conversion to republicanism. One recent author on the campaign has implied that as many as 1,000 British soldiers deserted after the battle.[16] Certainly the figure of 5 deserters (a very low rate) prior to 6 September compared to 234 deserters after that date would seem to be an indication of low morale in the army during its retreat but a closer examination of the return for 15 September reveals some interesting facts about the matter of desertion.

Table 5: Desertion in Prevost's Army, 7-15 September 1814
(Asterisks indicate former units of the Peninsula army)

Formation	Unit	Number Deserted
1st Brigade	3/27th Foot*	-
	1/39th Foot*	-
	76th Foot*	-
	1/88th Foot*	-
	Brigade Total:	-
2nd Brigade	2/8th Foot	39
	13th Foot	22
	49th Foot	18
	De Meuron's Regiment	74
	Canadian Voltigeurs	4
	Canadian Chasseurs	-
	Brigade Total:	157
3rd Brigade	1/3rd Foot*	12
	1/5th Foot*	3
	1/27thFoot	48
	1/58th Foot	12
	Brigade Total:	75
Artillery		-
Cavalry	19th Light Dragoons	2
	Total	**234**

Table 5 illustrates clearly that the rate of desertion among the Peninsular units was non-existent or very low. They remained steadfast to the colours—and this is perhaps an indication of both high unit morale and superior (that is, veteran) junior leadership. About 60% of the total desertion occurs in the 2nd Brigade, the non-Peninsular formation, which does not speak well for its leadership and the implication is that these troops, who had been serving in North America for

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but from Prevost's general strength figure of 10,351 officers and men who crossed the border in September 1814.

[16] David Fitz-Enz, *The Final Invasion: Plattsburgh, the War of 1812's Most Decisive Battle* (New York, 2001), 1974.

some time (more than a decade in the case of the 49th Foot) were no longer enamoured with life in the near wilderness. The two Canadian units, however, are the exception to that statement as their desertion rate was much lower than the British regulars in the 2nd Brigade. This is surprising as, throughout the War of 1812, the desertion rate for regular and near-regular units recruited in the Canadas was generally higher than British units. This high wartime Canadian desertion rate was probably due less to the fact that Canadians had any great affinity for their republican neighbours than to the fact that they had local connections whom might assist them, or from which they might obtain employment, and that Canadians were much capable of surviving in wilderness areas than were their British counterparts.

More important is the fact that just three units—2/8th Foot and De Meuron's Regiment from the 2nd Brigade and the 1/27th Foot from the 3rd Brigade—account for 161 deserters or 68% of the total desertion in the army. To answer why that should be so—or at least to postulate why it should be so—requires an investigation of the background of these three regiments.

De Meuron's Regiment was one of three Swiss mercenary units in Dutch colonial service (the other two being De Roll and De Watteville's Regiments) that were taken into the British army after the French conquest of Holland. It was intended that these units would be used primarily to garrison isolated posts and they served in the Mediterranean in that role for some time. Over the years, it became difficult for these regiments to procure recruits from French-occupied Switzerland and their enlisted ranks became filled with the flotsam and jetsam of the Napoleonic wars— Lithuanians, Poles, Illyrians, Germans (of all stripes and varieties), Latvians, Dalmatians, Bulgars, Slovakians, Italians, and not a few Frenchmen— although they retained their essentially Swiss officer corps. Such units could not be used against the French in mainland Europe because of the risk of desertion so, in 1813, De Meuron's and De Watteville's Regiments were sent to North America, always regarded by the British War Office as a secondary theatre. Their record in action was variable. De Watteville's Regiment performed well during the attack on Oswego in May 1814 and considerably less well during the seige of Fort Erie in August and September 1814 when nearly a third of the regiment deserted. It would appear that, in this respect, De Meuron's Regiment was no better and it is not surprising that this unit, composed of men who had little reason to fight anybody, suffered from the worst desertion in Prevost's army.[17]

The 2nd Battalion of the 8th Foot is a different kettle of fish. It was raised in 1803 and served in garrisons in Britain until 1809 when it participated in the ill-fated Walcheren expedition in the Scheldt Estuary. This low-lying swampy area was notoriously unhealthy and the troops involved were devastated by fevers—in December 1810 a War Office investigation of 39,219 men embarked for Walcheren revealed that 106 were killed, 86 had deserted, 3,960 had died from sickness and 11,513 were still on the sick list. What made the Walcheren fever so dangerous was its recurrence—even after Walcheren units returned to Britain, they suffered from debilitating sick rates for years and could only be employed on limited duties. Walcheren regiments sent to the Peninsula army proved so susceptible to illness that they were virtually unemployable and Wellington requested that he not be sent such units. The other problem with the Walcheren units was that they had to recruit back to strength in the last years of the Napoleonic Wars, at a time when British manpower was at a premium and their ranks were filled

[17] R.L. Yaples, "The Auxiliaries: Foreign and Miscellaneous Regiments in the British Army,1802-1817," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Rese*arch (1970), 10-28.

with men who did not meet even the minimal physical and age standards, or underage boys. It must always be noted that during the Napoleonic period, there was no conscription for foreign service, men had to volunteer for it.

As the 2/8th Foot could not be employed in Europe, it was sent to garrison Nova Scotia in 1810 and remained there until the winter of 1813-1814 when it performed an arduous overland winter journey across New Brunswick to Quebec, a notable feat of marching but yet another adverse influence on the unit's health. As if all this was not bad enough, it would seem that the battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Roberton, was not the best of officers as he was, in fact, cashiered from the army in 1819. The inescapable conclusion is that the 2/8th Foot was a second-rate unit commanded by a second-rate officer and it is not surprising that many of its men deserted.[18]

The 1/27th Foot was an Irish unit that seen considerable service since the beginning of the war with France in 1793. In 1800, along with the 2/27th, it was sent out to Malta and remained in the Mediterranean until 1811 when it was transferred to the east coast of Spain where it campaigned for three years as part of Bentinck's army. It only joined Wellington at Bordeaux in the spring of 1814, after the French surrender, and was never formally part of his Peninsular army unlike its sister battalion, the 3/27th, which had an impressive combat record with Wellington. Both the 1st and 3rd/27th came to Lower Canada in the summer of 1814 and the Plattsburgh expedition was the 1/27th Foot's first and last major operation in North America. In contrast to the 2/8th Foot and De Meuron's Regiment, however, there is nothing in the record of the 1/27th that would indicate why it might suffer a high rate of desertion—its commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Neynoe, seems to have been a competent, if not inspiring officer. One factor that might be considered is that all three battalions of the 27th Foot served outside Britain for long periods, an unusual deployment as most British regiments kept a battalion in the United Kingdom to serve as a depot unit for active battalions campaigning overseas. As both the 1/27th and 2/27th spent considerable time in secondary theatres, it is quite possible that the cream of the recruits for the 27th Foot went to the 3rd Battalion, which served with Wellington's army. This would mean that the 1st and 2nd Battalions would have to take the residue or keep up their strength by recruiting whoever they could. The records give no indication that this was so but it is interesting that the 3/27th Foot, which was also part of Prevost's army, did not lose a man to desertion during the campaign.[19]

In the matter of desertion, therefore, the Peninsula units were almost blameless. The greater part of the deserters came from the brigade composed of non-Peninsular units and three regiments, for possible reasons that have been explored, contributed nearly 70% of the total.

Conclusions

The cherished myth of an invincible red-coated juggernaut composed of as many as 15,000 of Wellington's veterans coming to grief in the forests of northern New York and

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[18] A.C. Robertson, *Historical Record of the King's Liverpool Regiment of Foot* ... (London, 1883); Stuart Sutherland, *His Majesty's Gentlemen: A Directory of Regular British Army Officers of the War of 1812* (Toronto, 2000). On the Walcheren units, see Charles Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814* (London, 1913), 187.

[19] *The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, being the History of the Regiment from December 1688 to July 1914* ... (London, 1928); Sutherland, *His Majesty's Gentlemen*.

deserting in large numbers as a result, so beloved of many 19th century American historians, is exactly that—a myth.

As my examination of Prevost's army in September 1814 demonstrates, his overall strength on the day of the battle of Plattsburgh was 8,972 all ranks, a much lower figure but one that still compares very favourably with the 1,770 healthy regulars under Macomb's command.[20] Only 6 of Prevost's 14 battalions were veteran units from Wellington's Peninsula Army and, of these veterans, only four complete battalions and two companies, totalling 2,625 officers and men, were present at Plattsburgh on the day of the battle.

There is no doubt that Prevost's army suffered a fairly high rate of desertion, 234 men, but only 15 of these men absconded from Peninsular units. The greater part of the deserters came from the 2nd Brigade, composed of British troops that had served in North America for some time, and, more interesting, just three units were responsible for 68% of the desertion rate. Finally, the regiment with the highest desertion rate, nearly a third of the total, was not a British but a nominally Swiss unit.

Putting it all together, the British army that invaded the United States in September 1814 was neither as large nor as elite, as many would have it, nor did it suffer from the high desertion rate that many have claimed. It was, however, as good an army as Britain could assemble in North America in the third year of the War of 1812 and the reasons for its lack of success lay beyond the scope of this article.[21]

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[20] Everest, *War in the Champlain Valley*, 164.

[21] The author completed his own in-depth examination of the Plattsburgh campaign of 1814 in his recent book, *And All Their Glory Past: Fort Erie, Plattsburgh and the Last Battles in the North* (Montreal, 2013).