

## CANADA

# Forgotten hero saved day for Canada in 1813: historian

Historian James Elliott is urging recognition of Sgt. Alexander Fraser as a saviour of the nation for his role in the war of 1812, writes **RANDY BOSWELL**.

As Canada prepares to mark the bicentennial of the War of 1812, a historian is urging long-overdue recognition for a “virtually unknown” hero whose stunning exploits during the “pivotal” Battle of Stoney Creek, he says, should rank Sgt. Alexander Fraser alongside Isaac Brock and Laura Secord as a saviour of the nation.

James Elliott, an author and journalist from Hamilton, recently published the most comprehensive account so far of the June 1813 battle on the Niagara Peninsula that unexpectedly thwarted the American army’s advance through Upper Canada.

And the crucial moment in Canada’s successful defence, he argues, was a daring charge through the darkness on June 6 — 197 years ago this Sunday — by the bayonet-wielding Fraser.

The Scottish-born sergeant, just 23 at the time, would be credited with spearing seven enemy soldiers, seizing control of a key American artillery position and — most remarkably — capturing two U.S. generals, all in a matter of minutes.

Fraser’s incredible charge essentially “decapitated” the invasion force, Elliott says, robbing U.S. troops of both Gen. John Chandler — who “never escaped the stigma of Stoney Creek, and bore it like a curse until he died” — and Gen. William Winder.

Fraser’s younger brother, Peter, killed four Americans in the assault. And the man directing the charge, Maj. Charles Plenderleath, is well known to have been courageous in command, taking two musket balls in the thigh and earning the Order of the Bath for his own exertions.

Elliott says it was Alexander Fraser’s battlefield leadership, though, that saved the day — and perhaps the country.

“It is by no means a stretch to connect Fraser’s charge and the subsequent collapse of the Niagara campaign of 1813,” says Elliott, author of *Strange Fatality: The Battle of Stoney Creek, 1813*.

The halting of the U.S. push into the future Ontario, Elliott contends, hinged on Fraser’s nighttime ambush of the enemy gunners, who were threatening to extend earlier U.S. victories and drive British-Canadian forces into a wholesale retreat from the Niagara frontier.

“I don’t think it’s generally appre-



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES ELLIOTT

As Canada prepares to mark the bicentennial of the War of 1812, historian and author James Elliott says the stunning exploits of virtually unknown hero Sgt. Alexander Fraser during the pivotal Battle of Stoney Creek should rank him as a saviour of the nation.

ciated how pivotal an action Stoney Creek was and how close the Americans came to bagging not only Upper Canada but possibly Lower Canada as well,” he told Canwest News Service.

“Had the Victoria Cross existed, Fraser would have been a prime candidate.”

Fraser was given a promotion after the battle, and following the war he remained in Canada and settled with other Scottish immigrants in the Ottawa Valley town of Perth, Ont.

He later saw action helping to put down the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837 and raised a large family before his death at age 82 in 1872.

He was eulogized in the local newspaper as “the beau ideal of a Highland gentleman” and as “a soldier every inch.”

Fraser was buried in the town’s Old Pioneer Cemetery, notes Elliott, “his pivotal role in the Battle of Stoney Creek virtually unknown in the country he helped save.”

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