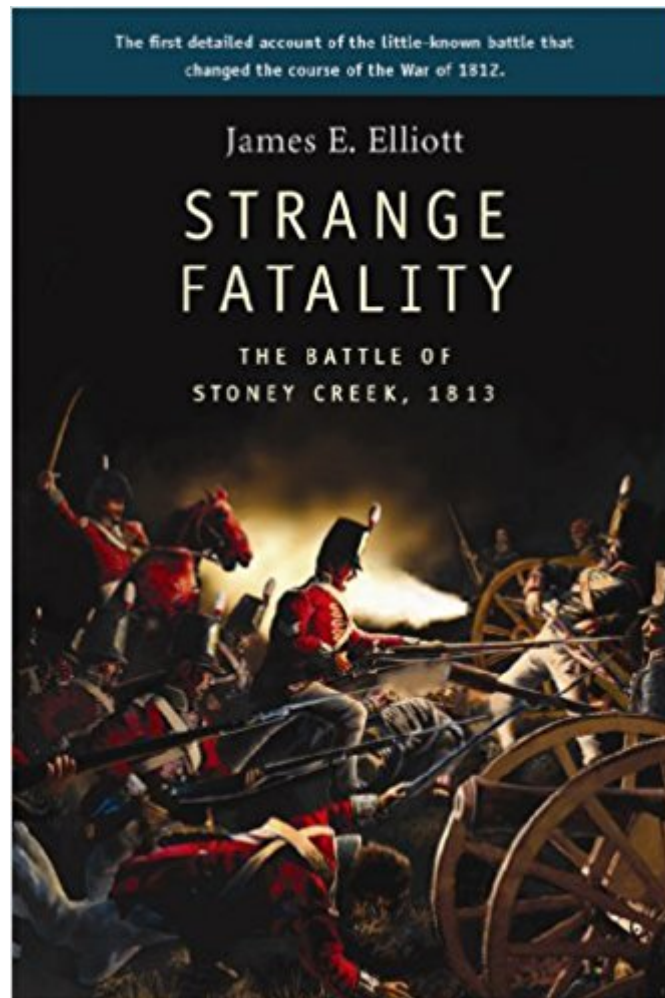




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Strange Fatality: The Battle Of Stoney Creek, 1813



Synopsis

In the spring of 1813, the largest amphibious force in American history to that point - 6,000 troops aboard 140 vessels - landed near the mouth of the Niagara River, routed the British garrison and captured Fort George. It was the second consecutive American victory and a sign that events of 1813 would redress the calamities of 1812. The badly mauled British army reeled westward, its leadership uncertain where, or how, the retreat would end. The American forces were poised to deliver the critical blow the War Hawks in Congress had dreamed of when they predicted a four-week war to subdue the British province. 10 days later, in a field near Stoney Creek, the promise of that triumph was smashed in a terrifying night action which hinged on a single bayonet charge that carried the American artillery and decapitated the American force. Little understood, even by Canadians, Stoney Creek was one of the most decisive reversals of fortune in the War of 1812 and determined the fate of the colony that would become Ontario.

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Customer Reviews

"Elliott has succeeded marvellously in turning a military history into a real cliff-hanger -- complete with chase, standoff, sneak attack in the middle of the night, unbelievable luck and victory over overwhelming odds." --Hans Werner, The Toronto Star, 26 July 2009 "One hell of a gripping story ... a nail-biting, flesh-and-blood showdown that feels like it took place last week. In almost any other country this would be a movie and a prominent piece of the national mythology." --Gord Henderson, The Windsor Star, 11 July 2009 "A gripping account of an important battle that separates the real soldiers from the poseurs...sparkles with wit and observation. --Geoff Heinrichs, The Globe and

Mail, 25 July 2009"Brings to life a tale of courage and incompetence. A gripping story about a little-known battle that changed the course of the war. He has done a superb job of integrating the contemporary sources into a fascinating narrative." --Robert Burnham, *The War of 1812 Magazine*, June 2009"A terrifying tale ... it really is a must-read." --Annette Hamm, CHCH TV, 15 June 2009

James Elliott is a Canadian journalist and author with a keen interest in early North American history. He has written widely on the War of 1812 and was a consultant on the award-winning television series *Canada: A People's History*. He is also author of the critically acclaimed book *If Ponies Rode Men*.

This is a good, in-depth look at the Battle of Stoney Creek, a fairly pivotal battle in the War of 1812. During the war, America invaded Canada in multiple campaigns in 1812, 1813, and 1814; while none were successful (and some quite disastrous) the 1813 campaign was the closest the US ever got to "conquering" Canada (specifically, Upper Canada, now known as Ontario) and Stoney Creek was the furthest (distance-wise) any US invasion force ever got. Prior to this, I had read only a general military history of the war (Pierre Berton's two volume set, *The American Invasion of Canada: The War of 1812's First Year* and *Flames Across the Border: 1813-1814*) so I was concerned that a whole book focused on a single battle wouldn't hold my interest, but for the most part that wasn't a problem. Why the US got no further than Stoney Creek is the specific topic of this book, but why all US efforts to invade/conquer Canada failed in 1813 is also covered as well, from the brief moments of US success (capturing Ft. George, covered in great detail) to post-Stoney Creek failures (Beaver Dams, covered briefly). My favorite part of the main text profiles the relative experience and background of the British regulars resisting the US invasion vs. the much more numerous but relatively disorganized and "green" US forces sent to face them. For anyone who's read about the US Revolutionary War, and what made the US successful then, there are paradoxes galore to explore in the 1813 campaign. Finally, the 3 lengthy codas Elliott has included -- about the disposition of war dead in Stoney Creek over the last two hundred years, the not uncontroversial (but well-researched and considered) debunking of the Billy Green story, and especially the saga behind the building of the two monuments at Stoney Creek is just as fascinating, if not more so, than the rest of the book. History is interesting to me, but how history is remembered/preserved/used is even more interesting. This book will definitely be of interest to those who want to learn more about the War of 1812, especially the long, disastrous US campaigns to invade and conquer Canada, something we Americans don't focus on much (when we even do focus on the War of 1812).

In all my years of reading about the 'War of 1812' I have always thought that the twin battles of Crysler's Farm and Chateauguy were probably the most decisive ones of the entire war. But the Battle of Stoney Creek has always been at the back of my mind as also very decisive. Mr. Elliot has given us a great book on this small but critical battle in the War of 1812. He has more than half won me over into thinking that perhaps it was the most decisive battle of the war. The book has many illustrations and some great old photos of the battlefield. Canadians have needed a book like this for a long time. Thank you Mr. Elliot

I'd been looking forward to this book since I saw an article in the Stoney Creek News several months ago. (Ironically, my brother Stateside was able to get his hands on a copy before me.) I've spent almost half my life in Stoney Creek. (I did the mental calculations just this past weekend, walking through the parts of the town where the book's battle took place.) I spent most of my formative years here. I played in Stoney Creek the actual body of water, trekked around the Devil's Punch Bowl, the Bruce Trail is a route I run as an adult, most of my screenplays have some element of Stoney Creek to them, my current novel is set here.....and through all of this, throughout my entire life, the Battle of Stoney Creek has always been there, as social underpinning, and the Monument in so many ways, (with the changes going on in the 'City of Hamilton' of which we are now -regretfully- a part) is THE visual mnemonic for the town. So it was no small surprise to read Mr. Elliott's telling of this historical event, and reap the benefits of his exhaustively researched and meticulously laid-out efforts. (Before I go any further, I do want to express my gratitude that he's spent the time and effort he has in 'getting it right'. It's no small feat that he's accomplished, gathering what he's gathered, presenting it in so cohesive and cogent a way. Having done some research myself in my own writing efforts, I can appreciate entirely what lengths he quite clearly went to in producing 'Strange Fatality'. So the most effusive kudos to him.) I'm no fan of war. And I'll stop that tack right there, before it turns into a polemic. Even having confessed this, I was compelled to read this history, and to keep reading it once I'd begun. Mr. Elliott made my participation that much easier by not constructing some kind of paean to war, to 19th century warfare. It was descriptive, yes; he presents just enough detail to accomplish the requisite accuracy, but doesn't get bogged down in the absolute minutiae. Because he goes after the human elements with almost as much dedication as he does the military and political ones, the result isn't strictly a piece of cold reportage. It's a solid, studious piece of 'fact clearing-up'-age. However... This is the third book of historical non-fiction I've read in the past month, and I suspect that when it's done well, it's

understandable when someone says 'I don't read fiction; why do I need to read something that's been made up, when there are so many well-written true stories out there?'. But I've read some of these great retellings of history, and I've read less-than-great retellings of history...and the latter make me wish that their authors had taken a novelistic approach. 'Strange Fatality' is not the piece of captivating reading I was hoping for. I'd like to say that, because I now know the 'truth' behind the Battle of Stoney Creek (that it's actually not a piece of military wizardry, but rather a mélange of missteps, mistakes, a dearth of talent and a whole lot of luck), that my disappointment can be attributed primarily to the integrity of the facts of the day. (That is, in the end, it wasn't the stuff of particularly high drama.) But unfortunately, there's more to my disappointment than merely 'the materials he was given', referring of course, to Mr. Elliott. Anyone who sets out to 'explain' or 'relate' an historical occurrence, is, by definition, a storyteller. One of the best I've come across, where presenting notable events or developments, is Simon Winchester. There is a glee that comes off the page, an energy that gets transmitted when Winchester is doing what he does best, bringing all of his considerable talents of researcher, historian and *storyteller* to bear on his subject. I didn't find any of this with 'Fatality', and for me, this was the tome's greatest downfall. (Second to this, and contributing to it, is a decided lack of editorial oversight.) A great storyteller can transport you even with the most threadbare of tales. They can elevate the so-so to the transcendent. As I recently expressed in a tale of my own: 'it's all in the telling'. I am grateful that my hometown has been so well-served by Mr. Elliott's 'Strange Fatality'. I only wish that its delivery had been as profound (in an entertainment sense) as the event itself turned out to be in regards to how the rest of the War of 1812 unfolded, and that almost a century and a half later, I was able to grow up here, in Stoney Creek, as a free and proud Canadian. (My personal rating: 7/10)

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