

of George III. Vital endorsements are missing. Identifications, admittedly attempted with a frequency unknown to users of many other editorial projects, are nevertheless a hit-and-miss affair. Many obvious names are noted, but many of the less familiar remain just that. It is not enough to concede the inadequacy of the index, so vital to a work of this sort.

If this review reveals more than a slight sense of disappointment it is because so many of the flaws were avoidable, the product of carelessness, haste, or unfamiliarity with the general history of the period. Many of the problems, to be sure, derive from the nature of the project and deserved the undivided attention of a cluster of professional historians. Rear Admiral Eller, in remarking on the record of four years' filming of materials in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, noted we "still have not reached home port" (p. xiv). He was right.

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*The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History.* By J. Mackay Hitsman. ([Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1965. Pp. x, 265. Maps, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. \$7.50.)

Frequently a clever title induces a somewhat passive index scanner or book thumber to select a particular work. This is not the motive of the Canadian historian, Roger Hitsman, who attempts to convince the reader that, indeed, the War of 1812 was incredible and was marked by civil apathy, military incompetence, and a near worthless United States War Department. Only Sir George Prevost, superintendent-general of Canada, and the British regular soldier manage to escape the author's process of diminution. In combination these two forces drubbed the Americans in virtually every military encounter. In exuberantly assessing the British effort in 1814 Hitsman writes, "In the Northwest at least the British flag waved undisputed" (p. 205). The author's enthusiasm disposes of many events rather lightly, for British victories did not drum forth in quite so continuous a pattern. From the summer of 1813 American power in the West was supreme. The United States gained control of Lake Erie; placed Colonel Procter and his force of Redcoats, militia, and Indians in desperate straits for want of supplies; regained Fort Detroit; forced the enemy from Fort Malden; and shattered the dream of Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames.

Hitsman's forte is his analysis of the military struggle in Lower Canada. The area from Lake Ontario and Kingston to Montreal via the St. Lawrence River is the heart of the book. One is struck by the cautious character of both Commodore James Yeo and his American counterpart, Captain Isaac Chauncey, who carried out near comic naval maneuvers on Lake Ontario. Neither desired to risk an engagement without a clear superiority of gunpower. Historians have neglected the deployment of militia in protecting convoys of bateaux which carried much needed supplies up the northern life line. In turn, this action

freed the British regular for military operations. Supplies also came from another direction. The activities of frontier merchants in New York and Vermont can either be termed entrepreneurship or smuggling depending upon one's tastes. Higher prices paid by the Commissariat Department of the British Army appealed to those transporting goods by sleigh across the frozen St. Lawrence.

The author's use of government documents—particularly those from the public archives of Canada—is impressive and reveals gaps in earlier scholarship. Yet the vast and scattered diaries and personal letters might have been drawn upon to complement the cold numbers of prisoners captured or the fire power of various ships. Better omitted are such quotations as the first verse of the national anthem written during the British bombardment of Baltimore (p. 212). On a brighter note, the detailed maps and carefully selected illustrations are of the highest quality and provide a welcome contrast to other recent works on the War of 1812.

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*James K. Polk, Continentalist, 1843-1846. Volume II.* By Charles Sellers. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966. Pp. x, 513. Notes, illustrations, sources, index. \$12.50.)

This is the second installment of a massive three-volume biography of Polk. In the nine years since the appearance of the first volume a number of writers have argued about the relative greatness of American presidents, Polk included. Sellers is naturally inclined to bet on his man. He lays some stress on the legislative and diplomatic accomplishments of Polk's first fifteen months in office, but he avoids final judgment. This is just as well, for Polk still has the Mexican War to fight.

Sellers' greatest accomplishments in this volume are the examination and digestion of a staggering mass of public and personal papers. These record the fine Italian maneuverings of the Democratic and Whig parties through the presidential campaign of 1844, the final agonies of Texas annexation, the tedious Oregon debate, and the involvement with Mexico which ended in hostilities. If Sellers has missed any substantial collection of political correspondence, this reader is unaware of it. He knows his way around the smoke-filled rooms of the mid-forties as well as James Reston or Joseph Alsop today. For example, his account of how Polk used half-promises about cabinet posts to obtain Senate votes for the joint resolution on Texas goes far to clear up a problem hitherto explained almost entirely by speculation. Here and elsewhere Sellers balances admiration for Polk's deftness, persistence, and luck with regret that he had to incur suspicions of treachery and widen the breach between North and South.

Polk was less perceptive as a diplomat than as a politician; appropriately, Sellers loses some sureness of touch when he turns from domestic to foreign affairs, which occupy about half of the book. Even