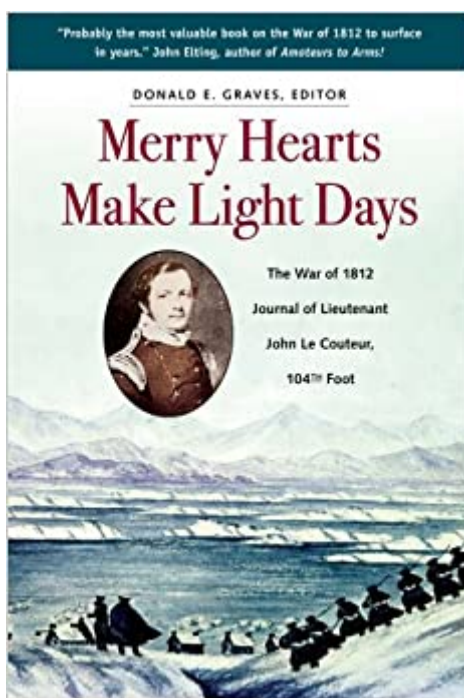


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# Merry Hearts Make Light Days: The War Of 1812 Journal Of Lieutenant John Le Couteur, 104th Foot



## Synopsis

In 1812, seventeen-year-old John Le Couteur, a British officer, arrived in Nova Scotia to learn that war had broken out between the United States and Great Britain. For the next three years he campaigned from Halifax to Buffalo, and he left this entertaining memoir of his experiences of storm-tossed voyages, arduous winter marches, battles and the perils of courtship, played out against the splendid landscapes of North America. His journal is regarded as one of the most useful and entertaining from the War of 1812.

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Probably the most valuable book on the War of 1812 to surface in years.

In 1812, seventeen-year-old John Le Couteur, a British officer, arrived in Nova Scotia to learn that war had broken out between the United States and Great Britain. For the next three years he campaigned from Halifax to Buffalo, and he left this entertaining memoir of his experiences of storm-tossed voyages, arduous winter marches, battles and the perils of courtship, played out against the splendid landscapes of North America. His journal is regarded as one of the most useful and entertaining from the War of 1812.

super as always

This is one of your classic British first-hand journals of the Napoleonic period. What makes this one unique is the fact that it's set in the War of 1812. John Le Couteur, a junior subaltern of the 104th Foot, provides an entertaining account of his life up to and including service in British North America. As a cadet officer of the New Royal Military Academy he was not one of your standard gents who purchased rank in the army. Still, we have every indication that our hero comes from a good family, and his numerous connections and frequent name dropping does drag the narrative a bit at times. In fact, were it not for the time spent on campaign, one might come away with the impression that a British officer of the period spent most of his time at soirees and convivial company! Certainly the difference between garrison life at Kingston, and campaigning on the Niagara frontier makes for considerable contrasts. It is important to remember that Le Couteur belonged to a particular class, and despite his humble entrance into the army, his station in life ensured a respectable reception at most establishments of the day. This was especially so in British North America where an officer had good status. While Le C does his rounds in the social set and flirts with the girls, we are reminded of the harsh realities of war. First the epic march in the dead winter of the 104th from Halifax to Montreal and then Kingston, Ontario was one of the major feats of the war. Le C provides a full chapter to chronicle that episode. The difficulties of finding lodging and having to accommodate living with numerous strangers seems almost a daily process for a time when barracks were not common features of garrisons. Officers had to roam about for suitable lodging, in contrast to the other ranks who camped on the open ground. We see action with our hero first at the mis-managed raid on Sackett's Harbor where Governor-General Prevost lost a significant opportunity to burn the US fleet. Then we see the 104th marching up to support their comrades at the chaotic night battle at Lundy's Lane, the bloodiest of the war. This is followed by the very costly siege at Fort Erie where Le C finally breaks down in tears at the tragic mishap of the assault. In general Le C has a somewhat patronizing view toward the Americans, a view held common by most British officers. The US forces are often referred to as the derogatory "Brother Jonathan" implying a silly, or uncouth country bumpkin. This term seems a carry over from the American Revolution. American actions in the war of 1812 were cloddish, but the British had their faults too as our narrator points out. In general he cites a universal relief at the cessation of hostilities in early 1815, claiming it to have been unnatural to fight against "Brother Jonathan". Those wanting a detailed account of the battles on the Niagara Frontier during 1813-14 won't really find that here. Le Couteur writes from the perspective of his own situation, which was that of a junior officer. The narrative is rich however with personal experiences, and lively discourse. We find many interesting accounts of skirmishes since our hero was in the Light Company and fought many small actions. Le C's

yearning for the numerous beauties he finds himself in company with reads almost like a Jane Austin novel at times. His lowly status and pay prevents their ardent desires for marriage. One suspects however that he enjoyed his time with the ladies! Donald Graves, a fine historian of the conflict, provides expert notes and a good setting for the context of this journal. Those wanting a lively account of a British officer who fought an unpopular war to defend Canada against US invasion should enjoy this work. It was because of the efforts of Le Counteur and others like him in the British army that Canada did not become just another state in the Union!

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