

‘A REMARKABLE FINE SHIP’
SIR JAMES YEO AND THE ST. LAWRENCE

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James Lucas Yeo was the sort of Royal Navy officer who embodied the era of Nelson and Trafalgar. He joined the navy before he reached his eleventh birthday and by 1797, not long after his fourteenth birthday, he was a lieutenant.

Yeo quickly proved to be a capable officer of initiative and daring. He was first lieutenant of the 46-gun *Loire* in June 1805 when the ship made an attack on the fortified Spanish port at Muros Bay. A harbour battery garrisoned by 250 men and armed with twelve cannon had the *Loire* under fire. Yeo led a shore party of fifty in a dramatic charge that carried the battery. Among the resulting prizes was the French privateer *Confiance*, of which Yeo was immediately given command.

He was made a post-captain two years later as a result of his part in the evacuation of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil in the face of a French invasion of Portugal. His action at Muros Bay was repeated, on a larger scale, when he led an Anglo-Portuguese force of some 400 men and a few heavy guns against a strongly fortified garrison of 1,200 men with over 200 guns at Cayenne in French Guiana. The resulting expulsion of the French from South America led to James Yeo's becoming the first Protestant awarded a knight commander's cross of the Portuguese order of St. Benedict of Avis. In 1810 he was awarded a British knighthood.

Early in 1811 Yeo was given the 32-gun *Southampton* and ordered to Jamaica. Then, on 19 March 1813, the young captain was given his most important post yet. He was appointed commodore and commander-in-chief of the naval forces on the Canadian Great Lakes.

The War of 1812-1814 was now into its second year. When it began the previous summer there had been few warships on the Great Lakes. On Lake Ontario the British had two small ships, two brigs and two schooners, all in the hands of an ineffectual Provincial Marine. The Americans could summon only the brig *Oneida*, placed on the lake in a largely futile attempt at enforcing the Embargo Act of 1807.

In July 1812 Lieutenant Hugh Earle was easily repulsed in an attack on the American naval base at Sackets Harbor. The lakes were then quiet until October, when the American Government substantially reinforced Sackets Harbor. The new commander, Isaac Chauncey, quickly commandeered six commercial schooners and loaded them with cannon. Then, with the *Oneida* flying his broad pennant, he led his tiny squadron out of Sackets for an indecisive attack on the British base at Kingston.

At the close of navigation that fall Chauncey and his Provincial Marine rivals began building up their fleets. The 1813 season opened with an attack on York by the American squadron. The retreating British destroyed one almost-completed warship on the stocks. Another, the *Wolfe*, was launched at Kingston at the beginning of May. Sir James Yeo, who arrived at Kingston the same day, immediately raised his broad pennant from her.

With Yeo's arrival Kingston became the only freshwater dockyard in the history of the Royal Navy. The harbour did, however, have long naval associations. Commercial vessels had been built at Cataraqui since the early days of the French regime, and naval vessels had been on the lake since the mid-eighteenth century. Even the "arms race" now conducted by Yeo and Chauncey might have had its roots as deep as the French-British contest in 1741.

Yeo took up his task with zeal. Within a month he attacked Chauncey's base at Sackets Harbor. The Americans launched the *General Pike* as Yeo roamed the lake in June, and in early August the two squadrons met at Niagara, where Yeo captured two American schooners and saw two more sunk. For a month a month that saw the British tragedy on Lake Erie—the two small fleets chased each other around Lake Ontario, jockeying for favourable conditions and positions. There were inconclusive clashes on 11 and 28 September. Then, in October, both commanders retired to their respective bases for the close of navigation.

Now the "Shipbuilder's War" assumed new proportions. There was no question of the importance of Lake Ontario; even the Duke of Wellington insisted that naval superiority on the lakes was the key to the defence of Canada. With Erie fallen, and the land routes to the Niagara frontier largely impassable, Lake Ontario was vital as a supply route to the North American interior. Success or failure in this theatre of operations hinged on who could have the strongest squadron with the opening of navigation in the spring of 1814. A single ship could represent a substantial part of one side's total strength; and, as in chess, the game was "lost if the enemy achieved by any means a superiority of a single piece."

Yeo's adversary was Commodore Isaac Chauncey, one of the stars of the young American Navy. Born four years before the revolution, Chauncey was forty-one years old in 1813. By nineteen he had commanded the commercial ship *Jenny*, and in 1799 he was appointed first lieutenant of the naval frigate *President*. For several years he saw steady action, successively commanding the *Chesapeake*, *New York*, and *John Adams*. He was aboard the flagship *Constitution* in the attack on Tripoli. In 1806 he was a captain, the highest statutory rank in the U.S. Navy. The opening of the War of 1812 saw him commanding the New York navy-yard.

These two veteran commanders, Yeo and Chauncey, were well aware of the importance of their task. Yeo had two frigates building at Kingston even before the close of navigation. And these were no lake schooners. At 60 and 44 guns respectively, they were full-size warships, comparable in every way to the ocean-going ships of the Royal Navy.

Yeo was at a disadvantage. Chauncey had relatively easy supply routes and communication; and, because of the number of American ships tied up by the Royal Navy blockade of the East Coast, far better resources all around. For Yeo, the expense of hauling ordnance up the St. Lawrence was exorbitant. The British Commodore felt a chronic shortage of seamen, ship-wrights, and dockyard workmen. Ship timber could no longer be easily procured, as the north shore had been stripped for export before the war began. In addition, the winter of 1813-14 was unusually mild, which further impeded land transportation.

Even so, Yeo made good progress by building the two frigates and converting his two captured schooners to brigs. At Sackets, Chauncey struggled to finish two brigs, two frigates, and the re-rigging of one schooner as a brig.

Seeing that he needed more strength still, Yeo determined to build another ship. Sir Gordon Drummond, President and Administrator of Upper Canada, approved of the plan, and Captain Richard O'Connor of the Kingston dockyard thought that "with exertion a small class frigate may be constructed by July ensuing." A call went out for more timber and supplies.

But by the beginning of February Yeo had reliable intelligence that the Americans were building three new ships—one 154 feet long, a brig and a large schooner—and had seventeen sail already afloat. He wrote to Sir George Prevost, governor-in-chief and commander of the British forces in North America, proposing to build a frigate 150 feet long on the gun deck and 44 feet in extreme breadth, which he thought "may be ready by July." Yeo and Prevost shared the

opinion that the 1814 campaign depended upon the number of vessels they could build that winter. Authorized to begin construction, the Commodore immediately called for still more men and supplies, though his demands were already being felt by Admiral Griffith on the Halifax Station.

On March 24, to his absolute horror, Commodore Isaac Chauncey learned that Sir James Yeo had laid the keel of a three-decked ship designed to carry 100 guns—a full-scale ship-of-the-line. The escalating arms race on Lake Ontario seemed to have gotten very much out of hand.

By mid-April, however, Yeo and Prevost received the unsettling news that, instead of authorizing the construction of more ships at Kingston, the British Admiralty had decided to send out what we would now call “prefab” ships. Two 32-gun frigates, dismantled, were already on their way. Yeo was not unduly alarmed, for his new ship was already begun, and must of course be completed. As he told Prevost, “the strength of the third ship, now building, is such as to give us a reasonable hope that [the new frigate] being sent up is unnecessary.”

On 14 April Yeo launched the frigates he had begun in the fall. Although Chauncey had launched two brigs in early April, the American Commodore felt unequal to Yeo’s squadron and thus stayed in Sackets when Yeo attacked Oswego at the beginning of May. After seizing considerable stores there, Yeo blockaded Chauncey at Sackets until Chauncey’s next ship was ready. Then Yeo returned to Kingston. As he wrote to Sir Gordon Drummond, their “large ship” would soon be ready—“what object have we for risking an action with our present force when we will so soon have the superiority?” Besides, as all of the participants were soon aware, Napoleon had abdicated in April, and the Canadas would no longer be the Empire’s “second best.” Instead of risking conflict with a slightly stronger American squadron, better to stay, as Prevost put it, “cautiously on the defensive... until the moment arrives, when by the addition of the large Ship now on the Stocks, you may bring the naval contest on this Lake fairly to an issue.” So, by the beginning of July, Yeo was being blockaded in his turn at Kingston as he awaited the completion of his big ship.

This leviathan was, however, posing considerable problems. Although he was receiving continual reinforcements, Yeo was critically short of seamen. He estimated on 5 June that he would need 640 men to operate the new ship. He plagued Griffith at Halifax, who, though able to provide some assistance, commented brusquely that since Yeo had no doubt told the Admiralty about his new ship, the Admiralty would no doubt supply a crew. Yeo was unconvinced. In

addition, he was still desperate for timber as well as skilled and unskilled workmen.

On 22 July Yeo placed the revised dimensions of his new ship before Prevost: “In consequence of the Enemy having Built a Ship at Sackets Harbour, carrying long 24 Pounder Guns, and laid down the Keel, of a Brig 80 feet in length, I have the Honour to propose to your Excellency of Building a Ship agreeably to the enclosed Dimensions ... Length on the Gun Deck—160 feet; Tread of the Keel on the Ground—148 feet; Beam Moulded—42 feet; Depth under the Gun Deck on the Limber Strakes—13 feet; Draught of Water with Stores on board—14 feet.”

That was a far cry from the “small class frigate” O’Conor had mentioned in February!

But if the new ship promised to be the saviour of Upper Canada, it was now taking its toll. It swallowed up most of the supplies coming over the laborious St. Lawrence route. It absorbed the energies of Yeo and his Royal Navy dockyard, and precluded any hope of the British squadron taking the lake.

Sir Gordon Drummond commanded the forces on the Niagara frontier. On 5 July the Battle of Chippawa took place. On the 25th at Lundy’s Lane there occurred as horrible a bloodbath as any in the annals of warfare. Even without these, the drains on Drummond’s resources, just maintaining his Right Division, were exhausting. After all, his principal supply route was Lake Ontario, and it currently belonged to Chauncey. As early as April, Drummond had been “apprehensive” about his army’s supplies. His concern grew through July, though it somewhat relieved when Yeo sent two brigs to run the American blockade, and by August he was desperate: “All, therefore, that can be done by your forces is to hasten the equipment of the new ship, and, the moment the squadron can sail, to push up to this point with every article of provisions and stores which the Department of the Army at Kingston may apply to you to receive.”

Commodore Chauncey, meanwhile, was also at odds with his army. After long delays in leaving Sackets after Yeo abandoned the blockade, Chauncey managed to offer a little help in supplying the American Army; though all the while keeping a nervous eye on Kingston lest Yeo dash across and take Sackets. His caution drew the criticism of the army commanders.

So, for the duration of the summer, there was little naval action. Chauncey managed to cow the crew of the British *Magnet* into firing their own ship, and in a brilliant small boat action on Lake Erie, Captain Dobbs of the Royal Navy

captured two American schooners. Otherwise, though, the entire conflict was focused on the ship-building at Kingston.

The warship was taking shape now. Instead of following the accepted Royal Navy practice of building the hull with raised fore and after decks, Yeo settled on a flat deck, level from bow to stern. This was apparently a Dutch custom, stronger, and allowing for more stern guns, which Yeo may have seen at Copenhagen in 1801. That he was able to recognize its advantages and break away from Royal Navy convention to incorporate it in his new ship speaks volumes for his originality and initiative.

The new ship was to have been completed by July. This was of course advanced when its size was enlarged. In June Chauncey reported: "This ship is progressing rapidly and the enemy calculates to launch her the first of August and fit her out immediately. My own impression is, however, that she cannot be got ready for service before October."

The first of August came and went, leaving both sides in suspense. The entire campaign hinged on this one ship. As the British Commissary-General, W.H. Robinson, succinctly put it, the new ship "will acquire naval superiority on Lake Ontario. If not the Right Division on Niagara cannot be supported." Conversely, the American General George McClure maintained that "should Chauncey continue to ride triumphant on the lake we would have but little fear on our frontier."

But when would the ship be ready? At the end of August Prevost wrote to Lord Bathurst that "the vacillatory communications I have received from Sir James Yeo put it out of my power to state to Your Lordship exactly when the first-rate ship building at Kingston will be launched," but he did not feel that it would be before mid-September. "In consequence all hopes of seeing our squadron on Lake Ontario before the first week in October have vanished." On 3 September O'Connor wrote that the ship "will be launched on the 8th inst. if nothing unfavorable occurs to prevent it."

Meanwhile Chauncey hovered outside the harbour, anxious for the slightest news. Major-General Brown, commanding the American Army, railed at him for not supporting the army while he had command of the lake. The British Right Division spirited in supplies on a brig and two schooners working at the head of the lake while Chauncey clung to Kingston. Both sides were licking their wounds from Lundy's Lane. There had been British reverses at Fort Erie. Washington had been sacked, but there was a humiliating defeat at Plattsburg on Lake Champlain,

where the ineffectual Prevost and his army had watched in horror as a small, redoubtable Royal Navy squadron was pounded to pieces.

Into this charged atmosphere, on 10 September, came H.M.S. *St. Lawrence*. Cannons roared in salute from the batteries of Point Frederick, as if ensuring the attention of the agitated American Commodore. Squealing and complaining, the massive hulk slid down the ways and stern first into Navy Bay. Her hull, uncharacteristically, was the muddy green colour of paint stocks requisitioned from a local yard. Her topsides were shining black with yellow ochre bands. There were flagpoles where the masts would soon be stepped, flags flying from each one. The Union Jack fluttered in the bows, and the red ensign at the stern.

She was, of course, a long way from being ready for battle. She had no masts, sails, rigging or guns, and she lacked literally hundreds of fittings, but her very appearance was enough to further unsettle Chauncey. “She had been only four months on the Stocks,” Yeo crowed, “and is a remarkable fine ship.”

In fact, the *St. Lawrence* was one of the world’s largest warships; larger even than Nelson’s *Victory*. She had grown to a full length of 194 feet, and 52 feet at the beam. Her armament came to 112 guns: 27 long 32-pounders, 41 long 24-pounders, three 68-pounder carronades, and 41 snub-nosed 32-pounder carronades. She needed 837 officers and seamen to man her. This, truly, was a mighty fighting ship.

Enough to worry Chauncey. He grudgingly transported General Izard and his army from Sackets to the Genesee River, then dashed back to Kingston, anxious of what Yeo might do if let out of his sight. Yeo armed the ship with growing confidence, speculating to Prevost—hoping, but surely not believing, that Chauncey would stay on the lake and engage him.

At Niagara, Drummond was desperate for relief. Major General Kempt at Kingston, however, reported on 20 September that *St. Lawrence* would not be ready for service before 7 October, and thus could hardly reach the Right Division until the 20th. Drummond was stunned. He had assumed that the fleet would immediately rush to his relief, and expected a strong American attack at any moment.

Far from planning a major offensive on the Niagara frontier, however, the American forces were anxiously eyeing Chauncey. The American Commodore, it seemed, could at any moment turn and flee for Sackets, abandoning all but his dockyard and precious ships. So far, the blockade was still effectual; on 28

September he prevented two British ships from running the blockade with supplies for Drummond, but it was a near thing. When he saw the two ships coming out of the harbour on a fair wind, Chauncey panicked and struggled to make sail and flee (which was evidently Yeo's intention). It was only when the British hove to at Chauncey's appearance that the American Commodore realized that Yeo was not bringing out his battleship. Chauncey sent *Lady of the Lake* in close to the harbour to watch Yeo's squadron and signal any movements. On 29 September her commander reported that *St. Lawrence* was hauled out in the stream and completely rigged, but her sails were not yet bent.

On 5 October Prevost learned that *St. Lawrence* would certainly be ready by the 15th, and decided to proceed to Kingston to supervise the remainder of the 1814 campaign. Chauncey was gone before the governor's arrival. On 5 October the *Sylph* crept in and saw "the enemy's large ship with sails bent, topgallant yards across and to all appearance perfectly ready for sea." The following day the American Commodore turned sail and fled, fully convinced that Yeo would fall upon Sackets Harbor within ten days. "This defeats all the objects of operations by land in this quarter," Izard moaned. Chauncey and the commandant of the garrison at Sackets called in the militia, which, with the troops that Izard had left for their protection, gave them a force of six thousand of all ranks and arms.

Drummond was becoming daily more frantic. On the 10th he wrote that he expected an attack, with the Americans using their Lake Erie squadron for troop transport. Yeo, amazingly, still professed to believe that Chauncey might pounce on his squadron were it fully burdened with supplies for the Right Division. A reconnaissance of Sackets had indicated that Chauncey was firmly ensconced under the guns of the batteries there, but a new problem had arisen. Already, with an incomplete load, *St. Lawrence* drew twenty-one feet of water. Loaded to her limit, she would be lowered two feet more and unable to use the harbours of Lake Ontario. Yeo therefore refused to take on any more supplies. Hearing this news, Drummond retorted angrily that should "the requisite supply of provisions and stores not come up in the squadron, and should any disaster happen to this division, (in consequence) and, above all, should Commodore Chauncey, (as is probable) decline an action, His Majesty's naval commander will, in my opinion, have much to answer for."

Finally, on 14 October, Yeo's squadron stood away from Kingston. Captain Frederick Hickey, who had arrived in June with reinforcements of seamen and dockyard workers, was in command; but the *St. Lawrence* flew Yeo's broad pennant, and the Commodore was aboard. Amazingly, Yeo still claimed to be uncertain of whether or not Chauncey would engage him.

The squadron set out for Niagara with a large consignment of supplies (including 4,000 loaves of bread aboard the *St. Lawrence*). Yeo assured Prevost “that he would return as soon as possible with as many of the sick and disabled of the Right Division as were in a situation to be removed, and convey another and much more ample supply of provisions, stores, and men, previous to the closing of navigation.”

The *St. Lawrence* performed well, even though she had to beat her way to the head of the lake against strong headwinds. Lightning shattered her main topgallant mast, but Yeo was undaunted. “I believe the *St. Lawrence* has completely gained the Naval ascendancy on this Lake,” he gloated, “and I am happy to say, she sails very superior to anything on it.” One sight was enough for the American army. Presumably sighting Yeo’s squadron off the Genesee, Brown ordered a full retreat. By 5 November, they were gone from Upper Canada, mining Fort Erie as they went.

Chauncey had not entirely given up, however. Late in April Yeo had made an unsuccessful bid to mine the ships in Sackets by sending in a small boat force under the cover of darkness. This seems to have given Chauncey the idea for a similar action. After his fleet had returned to Sackets, he sent a Midshipman McGowan on an attempt to slip a small boat into Navy Bay to mine the *St. Lawrence*. The assault was uncovered by two British boats, but McGowan captured them and proceeded with his plan - only to discover that *St. Lawrence* had already sailed for Niagara.

Yeo, meanwhile, arrived off Niagara on 18 October though rough weather prevented his landing troops or supplies for three days. Drummond, still fearing imminent attack, requested the loan of some of Yeo’s marines for his immediate defensive needs; Yeo, apparently still apprehensive of Chauncey, refused. On 22 October he sailed with wounded of the Right Division, and on the 24th anchored off Kingston.

He was met by a boat carrying Prevost’s Adjutant General, with an urgent request for Yeo to immediately carry some 1,600 troops with ordnance to Drummond’s relief. Yeo replied that he could take no more than 1,000 men, though he eventually carried more than 1,200, with a good supply of stores and ordnance, when he sailed on 30 October. Arriving off Niagara on 2 November, he hastily disembarked the troops, then sailed for York, presumably to transfer the ordnance to lighter vessels for easier landing.

Drummond, who had hastened to Niagara to meet Yeo and to suggest a combined attack on the right bank of the river, was perplexed by Yeo's disappearance, and immediately set out for Niagara. Yeo refused to co-operate in the assault, but before this went any further, intelligence reported a very large force assembled at Sackets. This was of course the force assembled to repulse any attack by Yeo, but, to the agitated army planners, an "important offensive" seemed to be contemplated. Yeo and Drummond sailed immediately, and anchored off Kingston on 10 November, finding, of course, that the rumour was groundless.

Drummond was anxious to immediately take the fleet back to Niagara, particularly after learning that an American force had broken through and destroyed many of the resources he had depended on to sustain his army over the winter. Yeo, however, consulting his pilots, felt it too close to the end of navigation to risk taking his ships back out on to the lake. There was far too much resting on these irreplaceable warships to have them wrecked on the lee shore of Lake Ontario! The squadron was, accordingly, laid up for the winter.

One of the pilots, John Richardson, later commented on the flotilla of warships that had accompanied *St. Lawrence*, saying that "war had now been so long carried out in the country as a matter of course, and on so extensive a scale of preparation, that these latter were scarcely regarded as anything extraordinary, even on the small and inland fresh water sea of Lake Ontario."

In fact, the "scale of preparation" was still escalating. One of the two frigates sent from England was assembled as the *Psyche* and launched on Christmas Day. By that time Chauncey had received clearance from the Secretary of the Navy to build two ships-of-the-line at Sackets. Yeo soon learned of this, and laid the keels for two more 120-gun battleships, to be called *Wolfe* and *Canada*. As one contemporary British historian caustically remarked, it was fortunate that "before the lakes were open in the ensuing spring, peace came, otherwise, there is no saying whether the building mania would not have continued, while room remained on the lake for working the ships."

Prevost was officially informed of the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war, on 1 March. An elegant ball was held aboard *St. Lawrence* on 4 March. On 11 April at Kingston, the Royal Navy entertained Chauncey aboard the warship, honouring him with a 13-gun salute. Yeo stopped at Sackets on his way back to England, commenting in admiration: "Such are their facilities that . . . they are more than half finished two ships of 120 guns each in thirty days."

On 30 May, Yeo made his final assessment of his late position: “The preservation of Canada by means of a naval force on the lakes will, in my opinion, be an endless, if not futile undertaking.” Any British successes were to a large part due to the “stupidity” of the Americans, an error Yeo did not think would be repeated.

Six days after he made this report Yeo was made commander-in-chief on the west coast of Africa, with a special responsibility for the anti-slavery patrol, and was to hoist his broad pennant over the *Inconstant*. He died from fever on board the *Semiramis* in 1817.

Chauncey went on to further conspicuous service of his country. If he was disappointed that he had been unable to take out his new battleship, *New Orleans*, it was not for long. In the summer of 1815 he was given *Washington*, one of the first ships of the line in the U.S. Navy, and commanded the Mediterranean squadron in 1816-18. Before his death in 1840 he was alternately a member of the Board of Navy Commissioners, and again commandant of the New York navy-yard.

Their lake warships were laid up in ordinary, made obsolete by the Rush-Bagot Agreement. The American vessels fell to pieces at Sackets Harbor. At Kingston, at least some attempt was made to hold the British vessels in reserve. In 1818 Robert Barrie, who had begun his Royal Navy career as a midshipman under George Vancouver, took charge of the dockyard. The ships were housed over, and their gear put into a warehouse ashore; one 1826 traveller commented that the yard was so well ordered that the squadron could put to sea in a month. But they slowly rotted away, due to neglect and to the haste with which they had been built.

Finally, in economic reforms following a Whig victory in the English Parliament in 1830, Barrie was ordered to dispose of the four largest vessels. They were auctioned in January, 1832, with due sentimental notice from the local press. The standing and running rigging brought £1,400, but only one ship was sold. Robert Drummond, a Kingston shipowner, contractor and brewer, bid £25 for the hulk of the mighty *St. Lawrence*.

The new owner of “this cidevant pride of the Canadian lakes ... dismantled her to the edge of the water, leaving her prodigious hulk the only remnant of her former majesty so firmly bedded in the bottom of the waters, as to render every prospect of its removal hopeless and impracticable.” Drummond’s contract, however, made it clear that he was responsible for its complete removal, so he was obliged to make another attempt early the following winter. Having just obtained the

Rideau, one of the dozen or so steamers on the lake, he attached her machinery to pumps. After an eventful four days' labour, closely assisted by Barrie and his officers, he was able to float the aged hull.

Drummond hoped to use "this immense uncouth Ark" as a wharf for his brewery. The *Rideau* accordingly hooked onto the hulk and towed it around Point Frederick. But she grounded some two hundred feet away from her destination, as if unable to face this final indignity. Drummond gave up in disgust. Two nights later, however, a heavy gale sprang up and miraculously placed the hulk in exactly the right position.

There she became a cordwood dock, storing fuel for Drummond's steamers. A wharf was extended out to her and holes were pierced in her sides so that sleighloads of wood could be hauled directly aboard. Finally, weakened by misuse and decay, smashed by gales off the lake, the great *St. Lawrence* disappeared beneath the waves.

She was not lost for long. During the early years of the twentieth century newspaperman C.H.J. Snider was collecting stories about her career, and as early as 1916 he grappled some white oak from the wreck. When the water level dropped in the early 1930s he was able to wade out to her. "An extent of a hundred feet of the wreckage was exposed to the eye," he wrote. "One end disappeared into a reef of broken limestone which had been thrown over it by the waves and more broken stone and waterlogged debris filled the visible part of the remains, vanishing in deeper water towards the west. I saw the upper face of the keelson, and great many straight timbers, floor-frames or lower futtocks apparently and a large quantity of planking and waling, for sides and ceiling and deck, all broken and in disorder."

Snider and his assistants salvaged timber, coins, tokens and metalwork from the wreck. Local craftsmen made souvenirs with recovered wood. A swivel gun, with mount still attached, had been salvaged in 1920, and one local resident had an axe which he claimed had been used at the ship's launching. The bell in Kingston's St. Andrew's Church was made with copper salvaged from the *St. Lawrence*. In 1938 Ronald Way, director of the recently-restored Fort Henry, sponsored dives on the wreck. Although higher water and construction obliterated part of the site in the 1940s, oak and teak were still being raised in the late 1950s—one Canadian historian is said to have a stool made with oak from the wreck.

But despite the recovery of these many relics, the site has never been properly surveyed. Although it is within the reach of shore-based construction and sport divers, the amazing preservation of contemporary wrecks in Lake Ontario makes it possible that the site may yet provide worthwhile study. Preserve Our Wrecks Kingston (POW) is at last launching a detailed examination of the site.

These, and other discoveries on the floor of Lake Ontario, are shedding new light on the Shipbuilder's War, drawing renewed attention to it. Again the question is asked—was the arms race, and ultimately the construction of the battleship *St. Lawrence*, justified?

James Yeo chose a course of action and followed it resolutely. He needed a strong squadron that could hold open the vital supply route of Lake Ontario; he saw the building of *St. Lawrence* as a way of achieving an overwhelming superiority at one stroke. If anything, he was guilty of expecting Chauncey to act more firmly than he did. But then, this may have been largely posturing on Yeo's part—by exaggerating the likelihood of a fleet action, Yeo may have been reinforcing his justification for the strength to which he had built his squadron.

Perhaps he was, like Chauncey, a little too cavalier towards the needs of his army—hardly unusual for a naval commander. He was particularly out of patience with Prevost, whom he saw as responsible for the Lake Champlain fiasco. Perhaps Yeo was just anxious to avoid the fate of those unfortunate commanders, Downie and Barclay, on Lakes Champlain and Erie, who had been forced into premature action by army commanders and thus annihilated.

This was the last lake on which the British had a real naval presence. It was a crucial supply route. Yeo's first duty was the safety of that supply route. The use of it, for the transport constantly urged by the army commanders, came second.

That the Admiralty endorsed Yeo's position is amply demonstrated by the favourable appointment he was given after the Treaty of Ghent, when so many naval officers were finding themselves thrown ashore on halfpay. Yeo's defence of Lake Ontario, essential for the defence of the country, certainly places him among the few Canadian heroes of the War of 1812.