

*The Flags
of War*

John Wilson

KIDS CAN PRESS

KCP Fiction is an imprint of Kids Can Press

Text © 2004 John Wilson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of Kids Can Press Ltd. or, in case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a license from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright license, visit www.accesscopyright.ca or call toll free to 1-800-893-5777.

This is a work of fiction and any resemblance of characters to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Kids Can Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Ontario, through the Ontario Media Development Corporation's Ontario Book Initiative; the Ontario Arts Council; the Canada Council for the Arts; and the Government of Canada, through the BPIDP, for our publishing activity.

Published in Canada by
Kids Can Press Ltd.
29 Birch Avenue
Toronto, ON M4V 1E2

Published in the U.S. by
Kids Can Press Ltd.
2250 Military Road
Tonawanda, NY 14150

www.kidscanpress.com

Edited by Charis Wahl
Designed by Carolyn Sebestyen
Cover designed by Karen Powers

Printed and bound in Canada

CM 04 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
CM PA 04 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Wilson, John (John Alexander), 1951–
The flags of war / John Wilson.

ISBN 1-55337-567-X (bound). ISBN 1-55337-568-8 (pbk.)

1. United States — History — Civil War, 1861–1865 — Juvenile fiction.
2. Fugitive slaves — Juvenile fiction. 3. Canada — History — 1841–1867 — Juvenile fiction. I. Title.

PS8595.I5834F53 2004 jC813'.54 C2003-906833-1

Kids Can Press is a  Entertainment company

For Colin Campbell, who first showed me
that the stories in history could be fun

P R O L O G U E

*The flags of war like storm-birds fly,
The charging trumpets blow;
Yet rolls no thunder in the sky,
No earthquake strives below.*

*And, calm and patient, Nature keeps
Her ancient promise well,
Though o'er her bloom and greenness sweeps
The battle's breath of hell.*

from "The Battle Autumn of 1862"
— John Greenleaf Whittier

April 16, 1746
Culloden Moor, Scotland

The heavy black cannonball bounced twice over the spongy mat of heather before decapitating the man to Rory McGregor's left. Rory glanced down at the shattered, bloodstained pile that moments before had been a living human being. He had a vague impression of an unkempt, unwashed scarecrow dressed in tartan rags, but that could have described any of the five thousand Highlanders gathered on Culloden Moor that Wednesday afternoon. Rory was not shocked by the sight of the mutilated body — there had been far too many for that. He was simply glad it was not him.

In front of Rory, a rolling wall of dark, acrid smoke allowed only brief glimpses of the red-coated English soldiers four hundred paces away. They were standing at attention in rows, three deep, and each carried a musket topped with a long bayonet. Scattered bodies

lay on the heather, but the Scottish cannons, long ago silenced by the English guns, had done little damage.

Cannonballs continued to arrive out of the drifting smoke, bouncing leisurely before tearing bloody holes in the six-deep Highland ranks. They seemed to be traveling so slowly that it would be easy enough to get out of their way, but if you sighted one coming toward you, it would be the last thing you ever saw.

Rory gripped his round wood and leather target tighter. He rested the tip of his sword — the mighty claymore that could split a man in two — on the ground, conserving his strength for the charge he knew was coming. Why had it not come already?

The charge was the great strength of the ragged Highland army — a screaming, lung-bursting surge that swept all before it in an insanity of pounding feet and slashing swords. It had worked before, at Prestonpans and Falkirk, and it was their only hope today.

Rory thought about what to do when the enemy line was reached. The trick was to pick a soldier and run at him. When you got close, the soldier would lunge with the long bayonet on the end of his musket. If you timed it right, you could knock the musket aside with the target on your left arm and bring the claymore down in a sweeping, deadly arc. Swing the sword to left and right and you were in among the redcoats, too close for their awkward bayonets. Then the enemy line would break and the soldiers would flee. After that, it was easy. All you had to do was run as far as you could, killing anyone you caught.

That was how they had always fought. Not this standing helplessly as cannonballs tore the arms and legs off your friends. And Rory had lost a lot of friends. There was Neil struggling for a final breath at the end of an English rope in Carlisle, Callum drowning in his own blood on an English bayonet at Falkirk and Patrick, the Irish volunteer, gazing in surprise at his stomach, ripped open by one of those damned cannonballs not fifteen minutes ago.

When Rory had left his home and his wife, Morag, hugely pregnant, he had been certain of his dream. He didn't want to drag a crop from the reluctant soil only to have it sold for the profit of some already-rich lord in London. He hated that he could be thrown off his ancestral land because the same lord decided that sheep were more profitable than people. He wanted Scotland to be free again. That powerful dream had led him to this cold, windswept moor, with these other ragged dreamers.

Their dream had almost come true. Last year the Highland army had marched in triumph through the streets of Edinburgh. The English had fled and Scotland was theirs. But Prince Charles Edward Stuart had wanted more. Bonnie Prince Charlie had wanted the throne of England, too. And so they had marched south. Far enough to scare the English king from London, but too far for supplies and support. All last winter had been a long, bitter retreat. But the running was over. The fate of Scotland would be decided this rainy afternoon.

Rory pulled his plaid closer around his shoulders and thought of Morag and the news that he was the father of fine twin boys. Angus and Lachlan he would call them. Good strong names. But what would their future hold if Rory's dream died this day?

Morag had a different dream — to begin a new life in the colonies. There, she said, you could be free, far away from kings, Scottish or English. Rory had laughed when she had begged him to go to the New World instead of to battle, but now he wasn't so sure her dream was wrong, especially if they lost today. And lose they would if the charge wasn't ordered soon.

Almost as Rory thought this, the charge began — not on an order from the prince, but spontaneously. The Clan Chattan, to Rory's left, broke and ran — not as frightened cowards toward the safety of the rear, but as enraged men, toward the guns and bayonets of the English.

It was all Rory and the others needed. Leaving the dead and dying, they were off, plaids pulled high out of the way of pumping legs as they leaped the tussocks of heather. At first, the huge claymores were held low and the men ran in silence, saving their breath, but as they cleared the smoke and saw the enemy, the swords were raised for killing and a mighty primeval shout swept along the line.

Grapeshot tore holes in the Highland charge. Disciplined musket volleys rolled along the redcoat lines. Men were falling all around Rory, but he fixed his attention on a tall soldier in front of him. Raising his

sword, he readied the target. But the soldier wasn't doing what he was supposed to — he wasn't trying to lunge at Rory. Instead, he was half turned to his right.

Rory had a brief thought that it was going to be easy before recognizing the trap he was falling into. Instead of battling the wild Highlander in front of them, the redcoats were protecting the man on their right. The Scottish targets were useless — the English could stab in under the upraised sword arm of the man attacking their neighbor. Now the unwieldy length of the bayonet was an advantage.

Rory felt the steel blade tear into the flesh of his side and scrape along his ribs. Desperately, he changed the direction of his blow and swung his sword to the right. He saw it dig deeply into the redcoat's neck, splitting him almost to the breastbone, then Rory's strength drained away and he fell into blackness.



Rory woke to feel the gentle rain falling on his up-turned face. He opened his mouth to moisten his parched tongue. He couldn't move his right arm, his side hurt and his plaid was soaked in blood. But how much was from his own wound and how much from the gash in the neck of the dead English soldier who lay across his body, Rory had no way of knowing.

The battle was over — that was obvious from the silence. The Highlanders had lost — that was obvious from the redcoats stalking about among the bodies. The

charge had failed. If Charles Stuart were still alive, he would never be king of Scotland. His Highland army lay dead across Culloden Moor.

Rory felt almost relieved that the dream of a free Scotland was gone. Now there was just him and Morag and the twins to think of. Somehow he had to survive and make Morag's dream come true — escape the bitter English repression that was bound to come and raise a strong family in peace in the Americas.

A harsh voice nearby broke into Rory's thoughts. "This un's still livin'. But not for long."

Rory shivered at the musket shot.

"Hell, Geordie," a second voice added. "That one was not going to get up and fight you. Don't waste the musket balls. Use the bayonet, man."

Slowly and painfully, Rory burrowed deeper beneath the body of the dead redcoat. Every move sent shocks of pain down his side, but eventually the man's body almost completely covered his own. Rory's head was buried in the gore of the man's shoulder, his face covered by lank, greasy hair.

I might be lucky, Rory thought. If I live until dark, I might be able to crawl away. If I travel at night and hide during the day, I might get home. If I don't bleed to death.

September 15, 1860

The woods near Cornwall, Canada West

Walt sat comfortably on the horse's broad back. His loose buckskin jacket and wool pants kept out the late afternoon chill. A musket rested reassuringly across his back, and his powder horn, bag of musket balls and water canteen hung from his belt. Suspended from his saddle were a dozen grouse and three rabbits. It had been a successful hunt and Walt was content.

The low sun filtered through the trees, creating patches of light and dark on the narrow trail. Birds twittered from branches overhead, small creatures scuttled through the fallen leaves and underbrush and the smell of pine filled the air. It was still mild and the winter stock of game was building well. The steady plod of the horse's hooves on the dry earth sent a

catchy tune around in Walt's head. It was a song his father, Kenneth, had taught him, a soldier's song from the War of 1812.

As Walt sang, he wondered if he would ever be a soldier. He was fifteen, old enough to fight, and there was talk of war to the south. There had been talk of little else in the past year, since John Brown had invaded Harpers Ferry, Virginia, and tried to incite a slave revolt. But that had not happened, and Brown had been easily captured and hanged. Since then, war had been on everyone's mind. Perhaps even Canada, united now for nearly twenty years and on the verge of attaining Dominion status within the British Empire, might be drawn in.

The words of the song were about a war long before Walt had been born, but the tune was catchy:

*“A bold fusilier came marching back through Rochester
Off for the wars in the far country,
And he sang as he marched
Through the crowded streets of Rochester,
‘Who’ll be a soldier with Wellington and me?’

Who’ll be a soldier? Who’ll be a soldier?
Who’ll be a soldier with Wellington and me?
And he sang as he marched,
Through the crowded streets of Rochester,
‘Who’ll be a soldier with Wellington and me?’”*

Walt enjoyed singing, but he only ever did it while no one was listening. People snickered or groaned, but the trees didn't seem to mind. Gaining confidence from the forest's lack of criticism, Walt belted out the next verse at the top of his lungs:

*“The King he has ordered new troops onto the continent,
To strike a last blow at the enemy.
And if you would be a soldier,
All in a scarlet uniform,
Take the King’s shilling for Wellington and me.

Take the King’s shilling! Take the King’s shilling!
Take the King’s shilling for Wellington and me.
And he sang as he marched,
Through the crowded streets of Rochester,
‘Take the King’s shilling for — ’”*

A deer broke cover to Walt's right and leaped across the track. The horse shied, throwing the boy painfully to the ground. Walt landed on his side, damaging neither the musket nor his back, but he was winded. His horse cantered a few steps before turning to gaze curiously at its former passenger.

“I guess he didn't think much of your singing,” said a deep voice. Twisting around, Walt sat up and looked at the approaching figure. He was big, both in height and girth, and had skin of the deepest black. He was

wearing patched dungarees over a worn, checked shirt, and both seemed stretched to the limit across his shoulders and chest. His dark, curly hair was strongly flecked with white. Despite the man's considerable age, his huge frame took up most of the path and exuded a sense of power. The musket nestled in the crook of his arm looked more like a whittled stick than a weapon.

"That was my supper for a good few days you scared off with your caterwauling," the man continued. The censure in the words was contradicted by the flashing white of a broad smile.

"Sorry, Touss," Walt said, hauling himself to his feet. "I didn't know you were out hunting, too."

"Well, no matter. There's plenty more deer where that one came from," the man went on as he stood beside Walt's horse, stroking its neck. "I see you've had a successful day."

Walt stepped stiffly forward and shook hands with Touss. "I have had my share of luck. Why don't you take a couple of grouse for supper since I scared yours away?"

"I'll do that," Touss replied with a smile, "but not for the deer — for having to listen to your howling. You should post warnings on the trees when you are out in the woods in full voice."

Walt laughed, used to Touss's teasing. He enjoyed his company and often visited Touss's nearby farm or accompanied him on short hunting expeditions.

Since slavery had been abolished in the British Empire almost thirty years before, Canada had become a

haven for slaves escaping from their owners to the south. Several worked as farm laborers around Cornwall, and a few owned a bit of land and some stock.

Touss was the last of a small family who had been granted a parcel of land for supporting the British in the American War of Independence more than eighty years before. His parents and two brothers were buried in a tiny cemetery behind the distinctive blue farmhouse, but Touss kept going. He was even something of a local hero. On November 9, 1813, as a boy of thirteen, Touss had run through the woods to warn the British commander of American landings at Cook's Tavern. The warning had no effect on the battle of Crysler's Farm that broke out by accident two days later, but people still remembered Touss's contribution to repelling the American invasion.

Walt took his horse's reins, and he and Touss walked side by side through the trees. He envied Touss his childhood exploits and hoped that war would come now and give him a chance to be a hero.

"Do you think there's going to be a war?" Walt asked.

"Maybe. Enough people seem to want one."

"I hope so."

"And why would you hope that, young Walter McGregor?"

"To free the slaves, of course," Walt answered quickly, expecting Touss to agree. But the big man kept silent and Walt became increasingly uncomfortable. "And for the adventure," he added.

“The adventure?” Touss asked with a half smile. “Too quiet around here for you, is it?”

“Yes, it is too quiet around here,” Walt answered, annoyed that Touss was making fun of him. “Nothing ever happens. And everyone else in my family had adventurous lives. Great-grandfather Rory was almost killed fighting the English at Culloden Moor in Scotland. His sons fought on different sides in the American Revolution. My grandfather, Lachlan, had to flee here afterward, and he never spoke to his twin brother, Angus, again. Even my father did something exciting in the War of 1812, but he won’t tell me what.”

Touss nodded, but remained silent.

“You fought in the War of 1812, too.”

“Well, I wouldn’t rightly say that I fought. I did a lot of running about in the woods and told some officers what I had seen, but I never fired a musket. The only things I ever shoot are deer — when I get the chance,” he said, flashing a smile.

Walt scowled at not being taken seriously.

“But my names fought in a lot of wars,” Touss went on hurriedly.

“Your names?”

“Sure. I don’t tell many people this, but I’m not merely Touss Washington. My full name is,” Touss pulled himself up to his full height and puffed out his chest in mock importance, “Toussaint L’Ouverture Spartacus Prosser Washington.”

Touss laughed at the expression of amazement on Walt’s face.

“Sure is a mouthful. That’s why I just go by Touss. Seems to make people more comfortable.”

“Why all those names?”

“Well,” Touss explained, “I was born on the first day of the century. My daddy was a freed slave, and he believed with a passion that this new century would see the end of slavery. To prepare me for the golden age of freedom, he gave me the names of famous men who had fought against slavery in the past. Spartacus led a revolt of slaves against the Romans near two thousand years ago, Toussaint L’Ouverture freed the slaves of Santo Domingo, and Gabrielle Prosser led slaves to attack Richmond just four months before I was born. Now, from all that famous collection of heroes, I could find none that wasn’t a great trial for people hereabouts to remember, so I shortened the first to Touss and that is how I have been known since Adam was a boy.”

“So if you had been born now, you might have been called John Brown?”

“I suppose I might have been,” Touss replied with another smile, “or Nat Turner or Denmark Vasse. There are a lot of brave men to choose from.”

“Well, I think there will be a war, and I think we will be a part of it. Then I will get *my* chance.”

“Don’t go looking for war,” Touss said, suddenly serious. “If it comes looking for you and you must

fight, then fight your hardest for what you believe is right, but war is not a thing to seek out.”

“But the people you are named for sought out war.”

“They did,” Touss said, “but they had few choices. They were slaves. It ain’t right for one human being to own another, or to whip, beat or brand a man. Either a slave accepts his lot or he rises up. He can just run away, if he has somewhere to run to, or he can rebel. My namesakes chose rebellion, but they were not some muddleheaded colonial boy wishing to fight in someone else’s war.

“Now, enough talk of war. Here is some real singing.” Touss cleared his throat and began:

*“When the sun comes up and the first quail calls,
Follow the drinking gourd.
For the old man’s awaiting to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the drinking gourd.*

*The riverbank makes a mighty good road.
The dead trees show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on
Follow the drinking gourd.*

*The river ends between two hills.
Follow the drinking gourd.
There’s another river on the other side,
Follow the drinking gourd.*

*Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the drinking gourd.
For the old man’s awaiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the drinking gourd.”*

The tuneful melody and Touss’s deep, rich voice had Walt humming along. “That’s pretty,” he said when Touss had finished.

“It’s more than pretty. It’s an escape map for slaves living in Mississippi and Alabama. And it’s a map to use even if you can’t read.”

“A map?” Walt asked.

“Sure. Midwinter down south, when the quail call, look at the sky and see the Big Dipper. Follow that north to the Tombigbee River, where peg legs carved on the old stumps show the way. Cross the hills to the Tennessee River and keep north to the Ohio River, where someone will meet you and take you to safe houses and Canada. It’s all there if you know it. And there are other versions for runaways in other parts of the South.”

Walt was amazed that there could be so much in a simple song.

It was almost dark by the time the pair came to a fork in the path. Walt untied a brace of grouse and a rabbit and handed them to Touss.

“Thank you,” the big man said, holding up the game. “For a couple of good suppers like this, maybe I’ll even let you sing to me again.”

Walt laughed. "Be careful, I might just do that."

"Say hello to your father for me," Touss said, turning down the left-hand fork.

"I will," Walt replied, remounting his horse and trotting down the right fork toward home.

Also by John Wilson
Flames of the Tiger



Dieter peered over the lip of the ditch. A burning Tiger tank lay stark and black against the sunset's fragile colors, its long cannon pointing uselessly at the heavens. Slowly Dieter scanned the field for signs of life — there were none.

As a boy growing up in Germany during Hitler's rise to power, Dieter has been seduced by the pomp and circumstance of war. But as global hostilities intensify, Dieter is called upon to fight for his country in a conflict that he doesn't fully understand.

Now, Dieter must run from everything he knows. With most of his family dead, Berlin in ruins and the Russian army closing in, Dieter can no longer naively cling to his childhood beliefs. The world he is facing is brutal, dirty and unforgiving. And the most he can hope for is the chance to survive.

And in the Morning



*As the wounded passed, a man from their ranks
broke the silence with "Are we downhearted?"
We responded with an ear-splitting "No!"
He snarled, "Well, you bloody well should be."*

Jim Hay is fifteen, thinks war is a glorious adventure and cannot wait for his turn to fight. But as his father boldly marches off to battle in August 1914, Jim must be content to record his thoughts and dreams in his journal.

Gradually, however, Jim's simple life begins to unravel. His father is killed in action, his mother suffers a breakdown, and when he does at last join up, it is as much to find a refuge as it is to seek glory.

What Jim discovers in the trenches of France is enough to dispel any romantic view of the war. And while his longing for adventure is replaced by a basic need to survive, the final tragic outcome is one he never dreamed of.