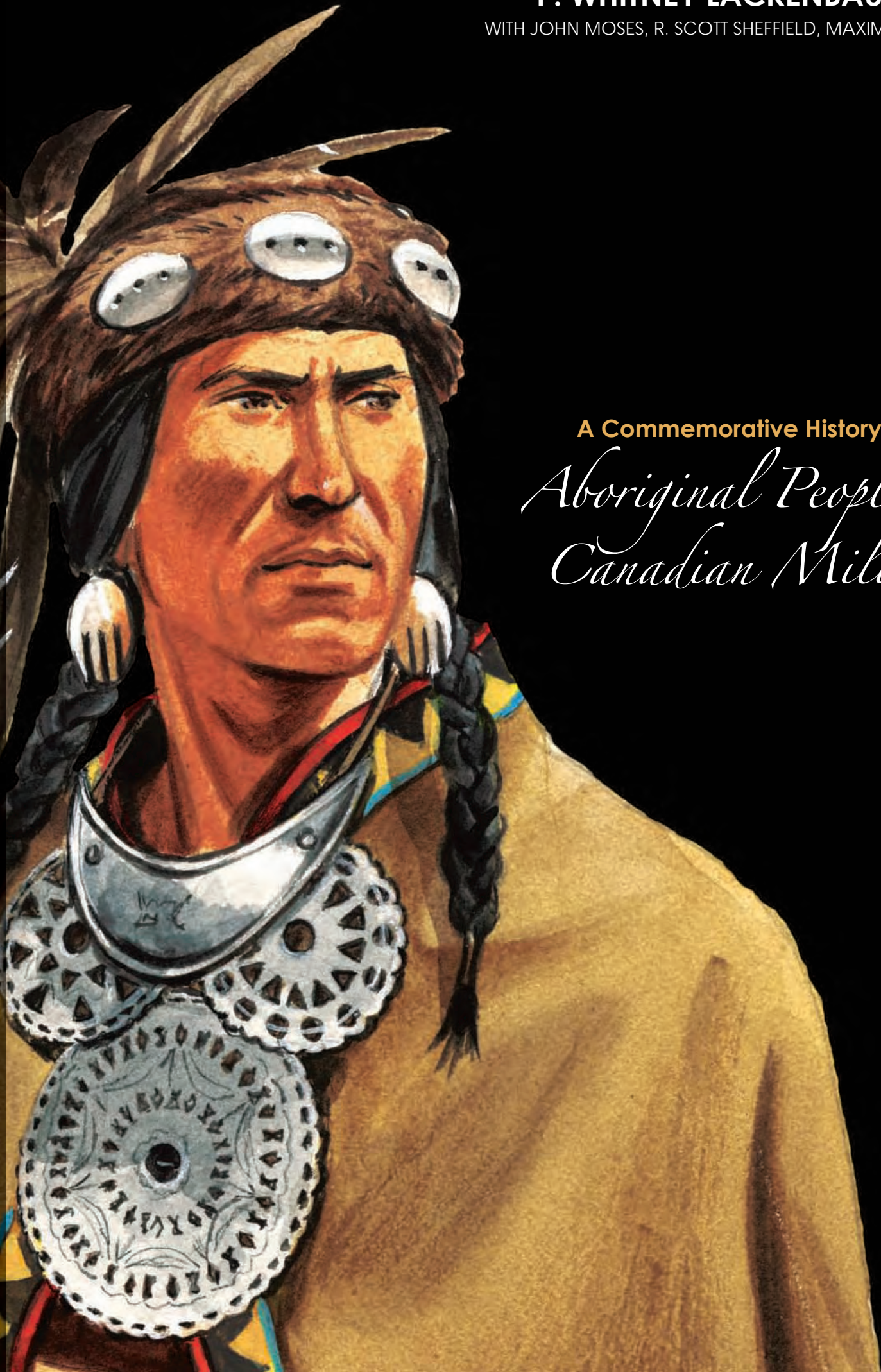


**P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER**

WITH JOHN MOSES, R. SCOTT SHEFFIELD, MAXIME GOHIER



**A Commemorative History of**  
*Aboriginal People in the  
Canadian Military*



Bering  
Sea

Arctic  
Ocean

Inuit

Inuit



PACIFIC  
Athabaska

Tsimshin

Kwakiutl

Nootka

Salish

Sarcee

Blackfoot

Gros Ventres

Assiniboine

Plains Cree

Pacific  
Ocean

PLAINS  
CULTURE

Kilometres

0 100 200 300

0 50 100 150 200

Miles

# The Aboriginal People in the Early Contact 1500–1650

Cover: Chief of the Ottawa nation, War of 1812,  
Painting by Ron Volstad [Department of National Defence]







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*Aboriginal People in the  
Canadian Military*





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D2-250/2-2009E

978-1-100-12652-4

Art Direction ADM(PA) DPAPS CS08-0436

# *Acknowledgements*

This history on our Aboriginal Peoples and their contribution to Canada's rich military heritage is the latest in a series of books prepared by the Director of History and Heritage commemorating especial military experience. The idea of this book and initial support to its realization came from the late Lieutenant-General Christian Couture who championed the cause of the Aboriginals in the Forces.

Today, more than 1800 First Nations, Inuit and Métis Canadians serve with the Canadian Forces at home and overseas with the same fervour and pride as their ancestors. Their diversity is extraordinary. They represent over 640 distinct bands, sharing common beliefs and practices, and all unique in themselves. As well, there are 55 languages and distinct dialects that belong to 11 linguistic families.

A sincere and heartfelt "thank you" must be extended to all those who contributed to this book and in recognition of their invaluable assistance to the successful completion of this project. They are: Lieutenant-Colonel Marcel Beaudry, Sergeant Ryan Davidson, Maurice Desautels, Arlene Doucette, Donald Graves, David Duguay, Ben Greenhous, Madeleine Lafleur-Lemire, Major Paul Lansey, John MacFarlane, Major-General Walter Semianiw, Warren Sinclair, the Canadian Forces Joint Imagery Centre, Yvan Rompré (translator), Élisabeth LeBoeuf (editor), the authors P. Whitney Lackenbauer, John Moses, R. Scott Sheffield, Maxime Gohier and our Aboriginal veterans.

## **Dr. Serge Bernier**

Director – History and Heritage



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# Introduction



# Warfare In Pre-Columbian North America

The European explorers who 'discovered' the Americas in the 15th Century came to a land already inhabited by a diverse and substantial indigenous population. According to Aboriginal creation stories, their ancestors had lived here forever. According to archaeologists, human beings had been living in what is now Canada for at least 12,000 years and probably much longer.

The indigenous peoples in this land were divided into a number of nations, which ethnologists classify on the basis of cultural and linguistic characteristics. In the east, from the Atlantic coast to the Great Lakes area, Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples mingled and divided the available resources in the sub-Arctic boreal forest and north-eastern deciduous woodlands. The former were generally nomadic, living by hunting, gathering and fishing. Generally, the Beothuk in Newfoundland, the Mi'kmaq, Abenaki and Malecite in the Maritimes, and the Algonquin, Attikamekw, Naskapi, Montagnais (now known as Innu), Odahwah, Nipissing, Ojibway and Cree in Quebec and Ontario all gathered in summer at sites of major fisheries to socialize, trade and make alliances. In the fall, they would disperse into kin-based hunting bands for the winter. On the other hand, the nations that spoke Iroquoian languages were much more

sedentary. The Five Nations (also known as the Iroquois or Hodeñosaunee), as well as the Huron, the Neutral, the Petun and the Erie, lived in villages of as many as 2,000 people in the area around Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron. Their homes were 10-30 metre-long 'longhouses' made of wood and covered with bark that each housed three to five families. They enjoyed a milder climate than most of their Algonquian neighbours that permitted the most northerly extension of indigenous agriculture in North America, growing corn, squash, beans, sunflowers and tobacco.

In the northern Plains, the Assiniboine and Blackfoot lived a nomadic pedestrian existence. They survived mainly by hunting bison, which were abundant at the time and met nearly all their needs, providing not only food but also hides for clothing and lodge coverings, as

Mohawk Warrior from Tyendinaga, Autumn 1813

The warriors from the small Mohawk community at tyendinaga near Kingston, although few Harbor and in the Niagara peninsula in 1813. Their most prominent service was rendered at the battle for Crysler's Farm in November, 1813 where they played a role disproportional of their numbers. This warrior is depicted as he may have appeared at Crysler's Farm.

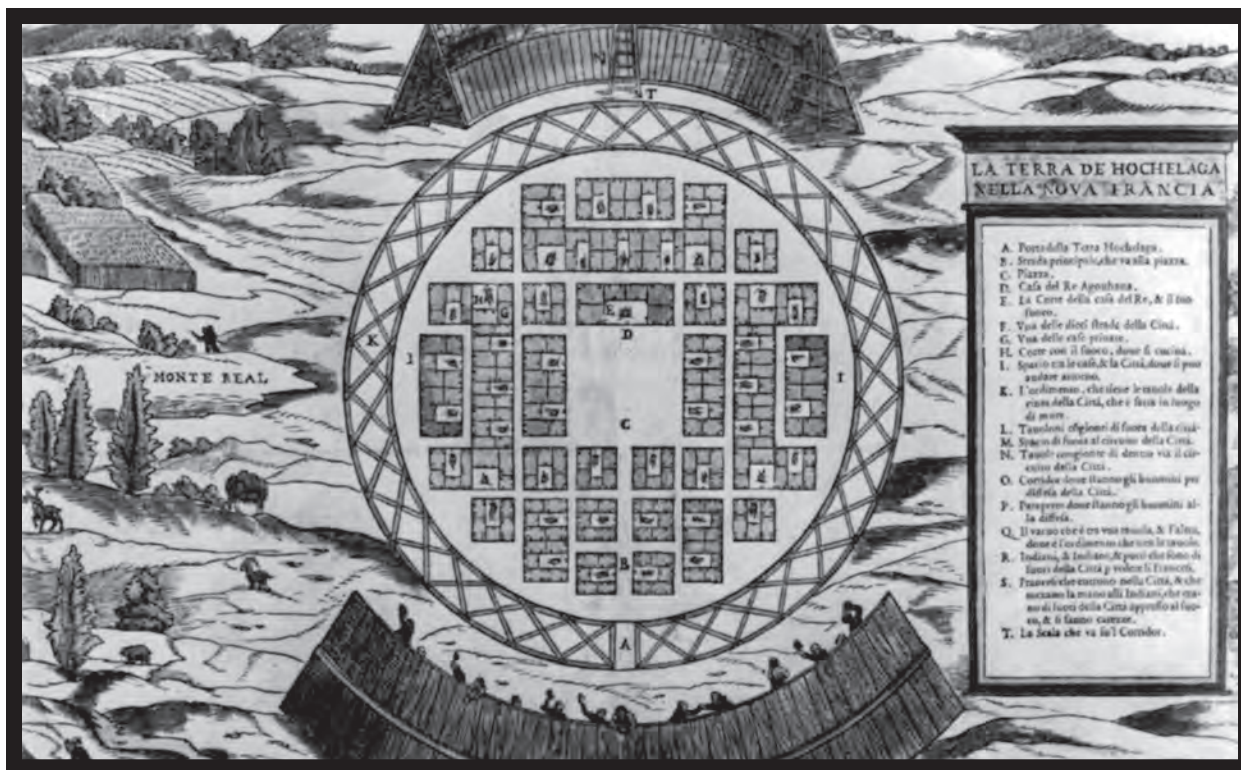
Painting by Ron Volstad [Department of National Defence]

well as horn and bones for tools and weapons. In the sub-arctic forests that stretched from northern Manitoba through the Northwest Territories to the Yukon lived highly mobile Athapascan speaking nations, including the Chipewyan, Slavey, Sekani, Dogrib, Beaver, Sarcee and Hare among others. They had a lifestyle similar to that of the Algonquian nations and subsisted mainly by hunting moose and caribou. On the other side of the Rockies were the peoples of the cordillera and Pacific Coast. Those nations in the mountainous interior included the Kootenay, as well as various Interior Salish and Athapascan speakers, who lived a varied hunting and gathering existence. In the linguistically diverse coastal region, Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth, Cowichan, Tlingit, Tsimshian, and others lived a lifestyle built around salmon and cedar. The rich subsistence economy of the region enabled some of the densest and most complex hierarchical societies found amongst hunter-gatherers anywhere in the world. The semi-sedentary patterns combined with the wealth of the coastal rain forest to enable highly elaborate artistic traditions to develop in wood carving, which they used to build homes and make canoes, utensils and various ceremonial and religious objects. The nations of this region were the last to come into contact with Europeans, when Russian, Spanish and British explorers arrived in the mid-to-late 18th Century.

Finally, the Thule and their cultural and biological descendants, the Inuit, whom the French generally called 'Esquimaux,' lived in the arctic north of the tree line. Their ingenious technologies, from snowhouses to kayaks, allowed them to live in an unaccommodating environment, where they necessarily relied on animal resources to survive. For most groups, the sea provided the most important resources: for example, seals provided food for humans and dogs, oil to heat homes and cook food, and hides which could be made into boots, summer clothing, tents, harpoon lines and dog harnesses. On land, caribou was their most important prey, providing meat, hides and sinew for clothing, and antler for tools. The Inuit seasonal cycle, like those followed by other indigenous peoples in northern North America, was well adapted to the characteristics of their homeland.

### **Warfare in Aboriginal societies**

Despite the myth that Aboriginals lived in happy harmony before the arrival of Europeans, war was central to the way of life of many First Nation cultures. Indeed, war was a persistent reality in all regions though, as Tom Holm has argued, it waxed in intensity, frequency and decisiveness. The causes were complex and often interrelated, springing from both individual and collective motivations and needs. At a personal level, young males often had strong incentives to participate in military operations, as brave exploits were a source of great



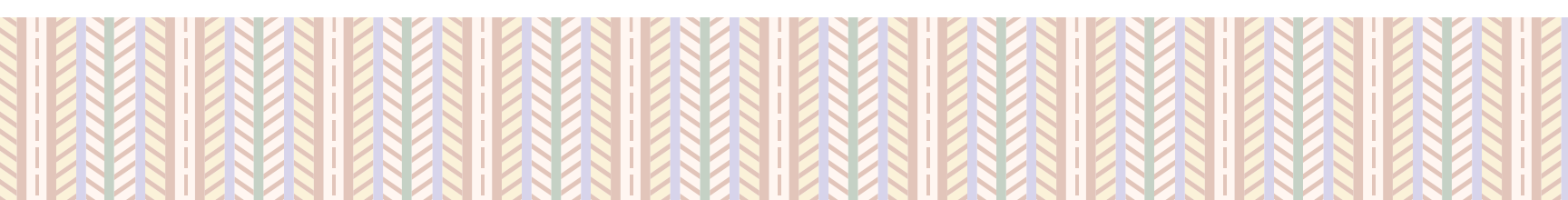
### Hochelaga around 1535

Library and Archives Canada (C-10489)

prestige in most Aboriginal cultures. According to one Jesuit account from the 18th Century, 'The only way to attract respect and public veneration among the Illinois is, as among the other Savages, to acquire a reputation as a skilful hunter, and particularly as a good warrior ... it is what they call being a true man.' Among west coast societies, the material goods and slaves acquired through raiding were important avenues to build up sufficient

wealth to host potlatches and other give-away ceremonies. At a community level, warfare played a multifaceted role, and was waged for different reasons. Some conflicts were waged for economic and political goals, such as gaining access to resources or territory, exacting tribute from another nation or controlling trade routes. Revenge was a consistent motivating factor across North America, a factor that could lead to recurrent

*Warfare In Pre-Columbian North America*





cycles of violence, often low intensity, which could last generations. Among the Iroquoian nations in the northeast, ‘mourning wars’ were practiced. Such conflicts involved raiding with the intent to capture prisoners, who were then adopted by bereaved families to replace family members who had died prematurely due to illness or war.

Archaeological evidence confirms the prominent role of warfare in indigenous societies well before the arrival of permanent European settlers. As early as the year 1000, for example, Huron, Neutral, Petun and Iroquois villages were increasingly fortified by a timber palisade that could be nearly 10 metres in height, sometimes villages built a second or even third ring to protect them against attacks by enemy nations. Craig Keener has described how these structures became larger and more elaborate through to the 1500s, with logs as large as 24 inches in diameter being used to construct the multi-layered defences, an enormous investment in communal labour that the villagers would not have made had it not been deemed necessary. Sieges and assaults on such fortified villages therefore must have occurred before Europeans arrived, and were certainly evident in the 17th and 18th Centuries. War also fuelled the development of highly complex political systems among these Iroquoian nations. The great confederacies, such as the Iroquois Confederation of Five Nations and the Huron Confederacy, probably created in the late 16th Century, grew out

of their members’ desire to stem the fratricidal wars that had been ravaging their societies for hundreds of years. They were organized around the Confederacy Council, which ruled on inter-tribal disputes in order to settle differences without bloodshed. The Councils also discussed matters of foreign policy, such as the organization of military expeditions and the creation of alliances.

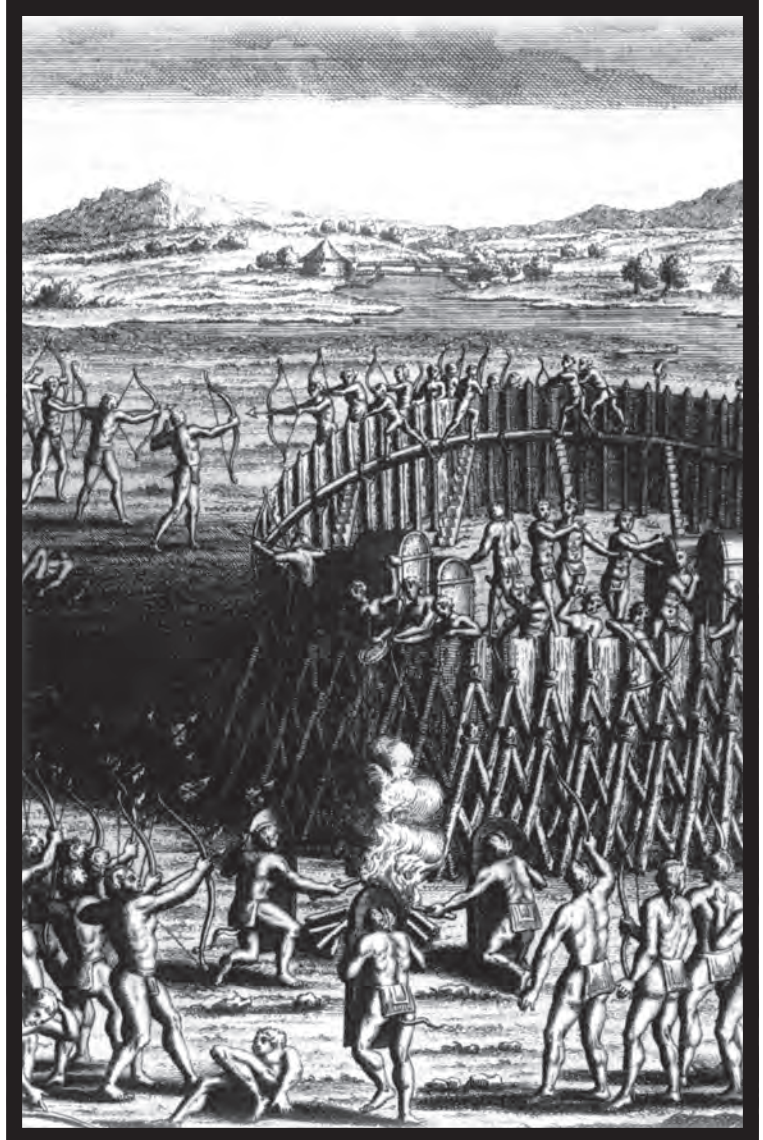
### Traditional military practices

Warfare prior to European colonisation varied by region, and much of the discussion below focuses on the northeast woodlands, but some patterns were commonly in evidence. In areas where large war parties could come together, formal battles occurred that were often highly ritualised and conducted in ways that limited the casualties. For instance, fur trader David Thompson recorded the following description by the Peigen elder, Saukamappee, of a battle with the Shoshone in the Eagle Hills region of Saskatchewan when he was a youth, long before the arrival of European guns and horses.

*After some singing and dancing, they sat down on the ground, and placed their large shields before them, which covered them. We did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields had to shelter two men. Theirs were all placed touching each other; their bows were not so long as ours, but of better wood, and the back was covered with the sinews of the bisons which made them very elastic, and*

*their arrows went a long way and whizzed about us as balls do from guns ... on both sides, several were wounded, but none lay on the ground; and the night put an end to the battle without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result unless one side was more numerous than the other.*

Similarly, in 1609, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain fought a battle against the Iroquois, alongside his Innu (Montagnais) allies. According to his detailed account of the encounter, the military practices were highly ritualistic and governed by strict rules. For example, when the two groups met on the shores of Lake Champlain, they negotiated the time at which the battle would take place. They decided to ‘wait until day to recognize each other and as soon as the sun rose’ they would wage battle. ‘The entire night was spent in dancing and singing,’ reports Champlain, with the two camps shouting ‘an infinite number of insults’ and threats at each other. When the sun rose, the armies, each made up of more than 200 warriors, faced each other in close ranks and approached calmly and slowly, preparing to join combat. All the warriors were armed with bows and arrows, and wore armour made of wood and bark woven with cotton. When Champlain and two other French soldiers opened fire with their arquebuses, they killed the three main Iroquois chiefs and the enemy retreated. Finally, hand-to-hand combat was engaged and the allies of the French captured 10 or 12 prisoners.



**Attack on aboriginal fort**

Attack on a fort during a battle between two Aboriginal nations.

Library and Archives Canada (C-92245)



#### Iroquois Warrior with musket, c. 1730

This man wears aboriginal clothing but is armed with a French military musket, acquired either through combat or trade, a war axe with an iron blade and a small scalping knife hung around his neck. Note the bayonet on the musket – although aboriginal warriors adopted European weapons, they did not adopt European tactics and were more likely to engage in hit and run ambushes than in stand-up, close quarter fighting.

Library and Archives Canada (C-003163)

Most Europeans were derisive of such relatively bloodless sport. It was “more of a pastime than to conquer or subdue enemies,” Captain John Underhill of Massachusetts Bay concluded after observing one such engagement. However, Europeans were less likely to witness the more common and more deadly raiding and ambushes that characterised the indigenous way of war across the continent. In the northeast woodlands and elsewhere, the advent of European firearms would quickly render such open field combat too costly according to indigenous cultural norms of war. After 1609, most observers reported that Aboriginal people did ‘not know how to fight in open country,’ and accounts of Aboriginal warfare usually described hit and run military techniques, which the French called ‘*la petite guerre*.’ This was essentially a form of guerrilla warfare, the primary goal of which was to inflict casualties, capture prisoners and take scalps, while suffering as few losses as possible. To do so, the warriors generally moved in small groups and took pains to catch the enemy unawares or encircle it, while eluding the same tactics by the other side. They took advantage of the terrain to remain concealed and ambush the enemy, or slipped into a camp by night to surprise the occupants in their sleep. Once they had achieved their objective, the warriors retreated before a counter-attack could be mounted.

While it suited conditions in the forests of North America, Aboriginal guerrilla warfare was far removed from



European methods of the time. To Europeans, who believed that rigid discipline was essential to produce a soldier capable of producing maximum fire through massed formation in the open, the Aboriginal warriors generally seemed to be undisciplined fighters without any sense of tactics. Moreover, “skulking” behind trees was viewed as cowardly, and actually aiming, particularly at officers, was unsporting and barbaric. Writing in 1715, the renowned French officer Louis Laporte de Louvigny described Aboriginal warriors as

*without order or discipline, with customs opposed to our own, who make promises they do not keep, follow as long as they wish, and return to their villages, readily abandoning the best planned enterprise on account of a mere dream, some superstition or some small unexpected accident .... Their fighting was limited to killing some man, taking the spoils, and when they are fortunate enough to destroy a French canoe or to find war munitions and clothes to wear, these are immense riches for them.*

However, Aboriginal warriors had a high regard for their own tactics, and were themselves often dismissive of Europeans modes of combat, which they considered courageous folly. For example, Makataimeshekiakiak (Black Sparrowhawk), a Sauk war chief who fought in the War of 1812, wrote:

*Instead of taking every opportunity to kill the enemy and preserve the lives of their own men (which among us is considered sound policy for a war chief), they advance in the open and fight, with no regard for the number of warriors they may lose! When the battle is over, they withdraw to celebrate and drink wine, as if nothing had happened, after which they set down a written declaration on what they have done, each side claiming victory! And neither of the two records half the dead in his own camp. They all fought bravely but would be no match for us at war. Our maxim is ‘kill the enemy and save our own men.’ These [white] chiefs are fine for paddling a canoe but not for steering it.*

Native-Newcomer contact brought two distinct military systems into interaction in North America, and initiated a process of mutual learning and borrowing.

### Warriors and Raids

While women played an important social and political role in indigenous societies, military activities were, like hunting, usually reserved for men. From a young age, boys were initiated into the use of weapons and were taught how to kill both animals and humans. The interrelationships between war and hunting were so close that warriors going to battle would sometimes say they were going ‘hunting for men.’ The warriors spent much

of their lives training and thereby developed remarkable skills. They were known for their dexterity in handling weapons and their ability to avoid the enemy's arrows. It was said of some warriors that they 'let fly [their arrows] so skilfully and so quickly that they barely give those who have rifles time to take aim.' They were also inured to the hardships of life in the outdoors or going without food for days if need be. One contemporary commentator wrote of the Iroquois: 'They often stay behind their trees for two or three days without eating, waiting for a favourable opportunity to kill an enemy.'

A great feast involving the entire community, at which time those who wanted to join the expedition danced and sang their 'war song', generally preceded major military expeditions. They then prepared themselves spiritually and physically for the warpath, in some instances painting their faces red (the colour of blood and of war) to keep the enemy from detecting 'any appearance of pallor or fear on their faces.' Sometimes, warriors would array themselves with other accoutrements to distinguish themselves from each other. For example, Iroquois chiefs wore elaborate headdresses as a sign of rank and the warriors decorated their shields and weapons with heraldic and spiritual symbols.

The warriors were often away for long periods. According to some contemporary European witnesses, they might travel as far as 'three to four hundred leagues [1,200 to 1,600 km] to slay a person and take a scalp,' though this

was an extreme example. In the 18th Century, Iroquois living in the St. Lawrence Valley would travel as far as Carolina to wage war against the nations they called the Flatheads (a generic term that included the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee). Covering such distances, they had to travel light. The warriors carried only their weapons and sometimes provisions of corn; they hunted along the way for other food. In summer, bark canoes carried them rapidly along the many waterways that crisscrossed the land. In winter, they travelled by snowshoe. Once they arrived in enemy territory, the warriors travelled only by night to avoid being seen. Often, they even stopped hunting, 'for fear that an animal that was only wounded would flee with the arrow in its body and alert their enemies to prepare to defend themselves.'

When the Europeans arrived, the main offensive weapon of a warrior in north-eastern America, was the bow and arrow. The arrowhead was usually made of bone or flaked stone. When they attacked a village, the warriors sometimes used burning arrows and some nations, such as the Erie, were even known to use poisoned arrows. The bow was slightly less than two metres long and powerful enough to propel an arrow more than 120 metres. However, the bow and arrow was most effective at short distances. In 1606, an arrow that passed through the dog he was holding in his arms killed a French sailor. Warriors were therefore taught to approach the enemy and let fly a volley of arrows before the adversary had time to react. The hatchet, better known by the Algonquin



name ‘tomahawk,’ and the war club (a bludgeon of approximately 60 cm usually made of a very hard wood and ending in a large ball) were used in hand-to-hand combat to knock down the opponent, who was then often finished off with a knife.

Aboriginal peoples quickly adopted European firearms. While the early arquebuses were less effective than the bow and arrow, since they were ‘too cumbersome and too slow,’ they had the advantage of emitting a thunderous noise when fired, frightening the enemy and making him more vulnerable. While a few Aboriginal peoples did manage to get their hands on firearms in the early 17th Century, it was not until the 1640s that they began acquiring them on a large scale. They quickly mastered the new technology and became more skilful in handling the weapons than their European counterparts. Indeed, Patrick Malone has argued that the Algonquian speaking tribes of New England also became keen judges of the technology. They quickly recognised the disadvantages of matchlock muskets, and began demanding the more expensive flintlocks, which better suited their hunting and ‘skulking way of war.’ Use of the bow and arrow continued for many years, especially in surprise attacks in which the sound of a gun firing would have alerted the enemy, but by the early 18th Century, most north-eastern First Nation were using the musket for hunting and combat.

### Scalping, torture and cannibalism

Some aspects of indigenous warfare shocked the European settlers. For example, the custom of scalping the enemy, which consisted in removing his hair by cutting off his scalp, scandalized many European observers. While some scholars have suggested that the Europeans themselves during first contact introduced this practice, it now appears certain that scalping existed well before colonization. In 1535, the explorer Jacques Cartier saw five scalps displayed in the village of Hochelaga. But while they acted indignant about the practice, the whites encouraged their allies to engage in it. In the 1630s, the British began offering a reward for the scalps of their enemies, the French followed suit in the 1680s. According to ethno-historians James Axtell and William Sturtevant, it was the Europeans (particularly the British settlers) who adopted the practice of scalping after contact with the Aboriginal peoples, prompted by the often attractive rewards paid by the colonial authorities.

Torturing prisoners was not uncommon among some indigenous cultures. According to an 18th Century account by the Jesuit Claude Allouez, who lived among the Illinois:

*It is the height of glory [for a warrior] when he takes prisoners and brings them back alive. As soon as he arrives, the entire village gathers and lines up along the path the captives will take.*

*The prisoners receive a cruel welcome: some tear out their fingernails, others cut off their fingers or ears, others beat them with sticks.*

The torture was however highly ritualized and apparently its purpose was to calm the souls of people who had died violently. The prisoner was usually tied to a post and his fingernails were pulled out and various parts of his body were burned, often with a brand or red-hot metal tools. The idea was to prolong the agony for as long as possible so the captive could prove his courage and endurance. The torment usually ended at the stake, where the prisoner was finally immolated. In some cases, the victors ate the heart or part of the body of a prisoner they considered particularly courageous. The Jesuit Jean de Brébeuf, who lived among the Huron in the 1630s, explained the ritualised cannibalism in these terms: ‘if [the prisoner] was valiant, they tore out his heart, grilled it on coals and distributed pieces to the youths; they believe it gives them courage.’

Not all captives were tortured and put to death. Women and young boys were generally spared and given to bereaved families to replace the deceased. When a prisoner was adopted in this manner, he or she took on the name, character, role and responsibilities of the person he or she was replacing and was treated with great affection. If he had been tortured, he was cared for and healed. Pierre-Esprit Radisson, a young French adventurer who was captured and tortured by the Iroquois in the 1650s, reported: ‘My [adoptive] mother treated my wounds and injuries ... and in less than 15 days the wounds had healed.’ War, therefore, occupied an important place in Aboriginal societies. Consequently, their relations with the Europeans were frequently of a military nature, either as allies or as enemies.



**French harquebusier**

French harquebusier in Canada, between 1610 and 1620.

Reconstitution by Michel Pétard [Department of National Defence]

*Warfare In Pre-Columbian North America*





# Chapter One





# The Arrival of the Europeans: 17th Century Wars

When Europeans began colonizing North America, they encountered warring Aboriginal nations. The pre-existing conflicts helped shape the networks of alliances that formed between the newcomers and the Aboriginal peoples, and had a significant impact on colonial wars up to the end of the 17th Century.

## First contacts

As far as we know, the Norse (Vikings) were the first Europeans to reach North America, sailing from their settlements in Iceland and Greenland. The Viking sagas relate that after several exploratory trips along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, a small settlement was established circa 1003 or 1004 in 'Vinland' (somewhere along the north-eastern coast). The expedition that founded the settlement at Leifsbudir (now L'Anse-aux-Meadows) near the Burin Peninsula consisted of about 65 people as well as domestic animals. The small community lived mainly by hunting, fishing and picking wild grapes. The first relations between the Vikings and the indigenous population, whom they called *skraelings* (probably Dorset Inuit or Beothuk), were fairly peaceful, revolving around trading. In the second year, however, some accounts suggest that a conflict broke out between the two groups when the Vikings refused to sell the *skraelings* weapons. Aboriginal warriors were armed

with bows and clubs that would have been as effective as Norse bows and axes in fighting small skirmishes, their canoes were easier to manoeuvre than Viking boats, and they were in a familiar environment. Being too few in number to sustain a war, the Vikings abandoned their settlement after only two years. It is possible that a second settlement was established briefly, at about the same time, near the current site of St. Paul's Bay, but the documents are contradictory on this point and archaeologists have yet to find any trace of it. The Vikings continued travelling to the Labrador coast up to the mid 14th Century, bringing boatloads of timber back to their barren settlements in Greenland. These expeditions were interrupted in the 1350s, however, when the Inuit drove these European settlers out of Greenland.

## Eastern Woodland Warriors c.1600

This painting by David Rickman shows three Eastern Woodland warriors with a variety of clothing and weapons. The figure in the center represents a war chief wearing wood lathe armour and carrying a war club. On the left is an archer in winter dress and on the right is a warrior in summer dress armed with a bow and a war club and equipped with a wooden shield.

Painting by David Rickman [Department of National Defence PMRC-92-605]



In the late 15th Century, English, French, and Portuguese navigators resumed exploration of Canada's Atlantic coast, seeking a route to Asia and its legendary wealth in spices, silk and precious metals. In 1497, John Cabot took possession of Newfoundland (or Cape Breton Island) for England and in 1534 Jacques Cartier explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the name of the King of France. In Chaleur Bay, Cartier's men met a group of Mi'kmaq, with whom they traded iron goods for furs. They then came to the Gaspé Peninsula, where they planted a cross to take possession of the land and encountered a group of Iroquoians from the Quebec City area (the Stadaconans). Cartier set an unfortunate precedent by kidnapping the two sons of their chief, Donnacona, and taking them back to France.

Cartier came back the following year with his two prisoners and, despite resistance from Donnacona and the Stadaconans, travelled up the river as far as Hochelaga (Montreal). Before leaving, he kidnapped Donnacona himself to be his guide on future trips. Since the Aboriginal chief died in captivity, Cartier's conduct was not conducive to subsequent harmonious relations with the Stadaconans. French attempts to establish a permanent settlement at Quebec City in 1541-1543 failed due to the harsh climate, an outbreak of scurvy and, most importantly, the hostility of the Iroquoian peoples, who killed approximately 35 of the French. Other explorers met with a similar fate. In 1577-1578, for example, the Englishman Martin Frobisher had several skirmishes with the Inuit while navigating along the coast of Baffin Island searching for the Northwest Passage.

The wave of European exploration and colonization was only beginning. In the second half of the 16th Century, Basque, British and French fishers, drawn by the fish stocks of Newfoundland's Grand Banks, established seasonal outposts on the coasts of Labrador, the Island of Newfoundland, Acadia and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Alongside their fishing and fish preservation activities, they developed trading relations with the Aboriginal peoples. Copper cauldrons, iron knives, axes and arrowheads, glass beads, mirrors and clothing were traded in exchange for the Aboriginal peoples' beaver pelts, which were used in Europe to make felt hats.



#### **French Crossbowman**

French crossbowman around 1541-42, wearing the white and black livery of the members of the Cartier and Roberval expedition to Canada.

*Reconstitution by Michel Pétard (Department of National Defence)*



Saint-Malo merchants were soon attracted by this new economy and, in the late 16th Century, men such as François du Pont-Gravé and Pierre du Gua de Monts launched purely commercial expeditions to the region. In 1604, having been granted a crown monopoly on the fur trade, de Monts began trying to establish trading posts in the Bay of Fundy and at Quebec City. He hired the geographer Samuel de Champlain for the purpose.

In 1608, Champlain founded the first permanent French settlement in the St. Lawrence valley at Quebec City. Over the next two decades, England, Holland and Sweden also established settlements along the Atlantic coast. For the European powers, the lucrative fur trade and the establishment of settlements gradually superseded the quest for the Northwest Passage.

*The Arrival of the Europeans: 17th Century Wars*

### Alliance-building

French relations with the Aboriginal peoples in the early 17th Century were largely determined by pre-existing intertribal conflicts. At the time Champlain established his settlement at Quebec City, no Aboriginal nation was permanently occupying the St. Lawrence Valley. The Iroquoians that Cartier had encountered some 50 years earlier were no longer there. It would appear they had been decimated by a long war with the Five Nations (the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca) – who occupied the land between the Hudson River and the Genesee River in what is now New York State – and perhaps by epidemics of European origin. In the early 1600s, therefore, the shores of the St. Lawrence were only a summer gathering place for Algonquin, Innu (Montagnais) and other Algonquian nations. They spent the rest of the year hunting in the interior. These nomadic nations were at war with the Iroquois, who apparently wanted to secure access to the emerging trade network in the St. Lawrence Valley. To establish solid trading relations with the Algonquin speakers surrounding Quebec, Champlain chose to ally himself with them and take sides in the conflict.

In 1603, when he spent the summer in Tadoussac, Champlain formed a trading and military alliance with the Algonquin, Innu (Montagnais) and Malecite nations. He promised to send forces to help them defeat the Iroquois but also offered to help them make peace with their enemies. Like

all administrators of New France after him, Champlain believed that establishing a general peace among all the Aboriginal peoples was the best way to promote trade and to peacefully settle the land. The Aboriginal response was clear: while they were prepared for the French to ‘people their land,’ they refused to make peace with the Iroquois and preferred that Champlain make war on their enemies. When he returned in 1608, Champlain renewed the alliance and was soon called upon to honour his promises and become involved in his allies’ war. In 1609, 1610 and 1615, he took part in raids against the Iroquois, along with several French soldiers and Algonquin, Innu (Montagnais) and Huron warriors. Then, in 1616, missionaries and soldiers were sent to Huronia to establish the first mission there and, most importantly, to cement the Franco-Huron alliance.

During the following 15 years, there were no major clashes between the Iroquois and the allies of the French, though occasional raids still took place. The two sides concluded a peace treaty in 1624. During the lull in the fighting, a flourishing trade network developed in New France, in which the Huron, an Iroquoian confederacy concentrated in the area between Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe in what is now the province of Ontario, played a vital role as middlemen. Because of their strategic geographic location, the Huron were able to funnel towards Quebec City large quantities of furs that they obtained from other nations in the Great Lakes region.

Meanwhile, in 1609, the Dutch began frequenting the shores of the Hudson River. In 1614, they established a trading post called Fort Orange near Iroquois territory, on the current site of the city of Albany. This development played a significant role in the period of relative calm between the Iroquois and the allies of the French, which lasted from 1615 until about 1630, since the Iroquois were busy fighting the Mohegan, an Algonquian nation that was blocking their access to the Dutch trading posts. Once the Mohegan had been driven from their land, the Iroquois made an alliance with the Dutch giving them direct access to European goods. Two major networks of alliances were now established in north-eastern North America and they would govern military relations for the next 150 years.

### **The Iroquois Wars**

In 1629, the Kirke brothers, who were in the service of England, drove the French out of the St. Lawrence Valley. When they retook possession of New France in 1632, the French found that the war between their old allies and the Iroquois had resumed. However, the situation had changed and it was now the Iroquois who were carrying out raids in the valley of the St. Lawrence. It is difficult to determine the precise causes of these 'Iroquois Wars,' which flared repeatedly for much of the next 70 years. It appears that economic, cultural and political factors were all involved.

The fur trade was likely a factor in these conflicts. The territory of the Iroquois Five Nations was not particularly rich in beaver, and their geographic location not ideally suited to capitalise on the burgeoning fur trade. This argument has been articulated by a number of scholars beginning with Francis Parkman and elaborated upon by Harold Innis and George Hunt. Essentially they believed the Iroquois were seeking, by means of war, to increase their sources of supply of pelts so they could obtain European goods, and eliminate their rivals to gain dominance of the trade. To secure these goals, three courses of action were available to them: to become middlemen between the Europeans and Aboriginal nations, to conquer new hunting grounds, or to lie in wait along the riverbanks in order to ambush and rob Aboriginal convoys travelling to the French trading posts. Under this interpretation, the Iroquois Wars came to be understood as the 'Beaver Wars.'

More recently, scholars such as Daniel Richter, George Sioui and José António Brandão have sought to challenge or refine the Beaver War interpretation, arguing for the importance of the mourning war as a collective motivation underlying Iroquois aggression. The introduction of infectious diseases against which the indigenous peoples had no antibodies powerfully affected many Aboriginal societies, including the Iroquois. Estimates suggest that up to one half of the population of the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes region was decimated by epidemics of European origin in the first half of the 17th



Century alone. In response to this unprecedented wave of deaths, it seems plausible that the Iroquois engaged in a massively amplified ‘mourning wars’ in order to replace their dead, sometimes capturing more than a thousand captives in a single raid.

The Iroquois’ desire to capture entire groups was apparently motivated not only by the need to replace their dead, but also by broader political goals: hegemonic ambitions, the quest for power over other nations. These ambitions are clearly expressed in the myth of the foundation of the Iroquois League, which was essentially its Constitution. It stipulated that, in addition to establishing an alliance among the Five Nations, the League would extend peace, by diplomacy or by force, to all the nations neighbouring on the land of the Iroquois. A vast alliance would be developed, within which the Iroquois saw themselves exercising a degree of authority by virtue of their key role as mediators among the other nations. The Iroquois frequently asserted throughout the 17th Century that they hoped to become ‘one people’ with all the nations in north-eastern America, contemporary European writers noted. For example, Denis Raudot, Intendant of New France, made the following observations about the Iroquois policy in the early 18th Century:

*They devoted all their energies to inducing the other nations to surrender and give themselves to them. They sent them presents and the most*

*skilful people of their nation to lecture them and tell them that if they did not give themselves up, they would be unable to avoid destruction, and those who fell into their hands would suffer the cruellest torments; but if on the contrary they wished to surrender and disperse to their cabins, they would become the masters of other men.*

It would be futile to attempt to single out, from among these factors, a sole cause for the Iroquois wars. It is highly probable that all of these factors played a decisive role at one point or another and to varying degrees. It is clear, however, that the wars waged by the Iroquois against the Aboriginal nations of the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes region were a serious threat to the fur trade in New France and to attempts by the French authorities to establish a general peace among the Aboriginal peoples. The French therefore became increasingly involved in the conflict.

When he returned to the colony in 1632, Champlain decided to settle the Iroquois problem once and for all by destroying the League of Five Nations. He renewed his alliance with the Algonquin, the Innu (Montagnais) and the Huron and again pledged to support them against their enemies. However, the colony had serious financial problems at the time and Champlain was never able to get France to provide the soldiers he needed to carry out his plans. He had to settle for supplying his allies



with weaponry such as iron arrowheads and knives. The economic difficulties continued after Champlain's death in 1635 and the French were never able to properly support their allies until the 1660s.

Despite the modest support from the French, the allies managed to continue the war and to inflict heavy losses on the Iroquois up to the late 1630s. In 1636, for example, Algonquin warriors organized a raid into Mohawk territory during which they killed 28 Iroquois and captured a number of others, five of whom were brought back alive to Quebec City to be tortured. In 1638, the Huron also succeeded in capturing more than a hundred Iroquois and killing many others.

In the 1640s, the tide gradually turned against the Franco-Aboriginal alliance. For one thing, the Iroquois changed their military tactics, as a Jesuit account testifies:

*In previous years, the Iroquois came in fairly large contingents at certain times during the summer and then left the river free, but this year they have changed their purpose and divided into small detachments of 20, 30, 50 or 100 at most, along all the passages and places on the river, and when one group leaves another takes its place. They are small, well-armed contingents that are constantly moving so as to occupy the entire river and prepare ambushes*

*everywhere, emerging unexpectedly and attacking Montagnais, Algonquin, Huron and French indiscriminately.*

The Iroquois also sought to split the Franco-Aboriginal alliance and tried to negotiate a separate peace with the French excluding the other Aboriginal nations. Two attempts were made, one in 1641 and the other in 1645. Though these efforts were in direct contradiction with the French desire to establish a general peace among the Aboriginal nations, they ultimately led to a Franco-Iroquois treaty, which was ratified in 1645. In a secret agreement with the French, the Iroquois succeeded in excluding from the treaty all Aboriginal peoples who had not converted to Christianity. While the peace lasted only a year, it did have the effect of undermining the Franco-Aboriginal alliance.

The decisive factor in the sudden shift in the balance of power between the Iroquois and the allies of the French was that the Iroquois had obtained firearms. In 1639, the Dutch ended the monopoly on the fur trade at Fort Orange. Merchants therefore flocked to the trading post and, despite repeated government prohibitions, began selling firearms to the Iroquois. By 1643, the Mohawk were equipped with nearly 300 muskets, while the Huron, Innu (Montagnais) and Algonquin had very few because the French, fearing that the weapons would some day be used against them, restricted the sale of

firearms to Aboriginal people who agreed to convert to Catholicism. The Jesuits reported that ‘since they have no arquebuses, the Huron, if they are encountered [by the Iroquois], as commonly occurs, have no defence other than flight, and if they are taken captive they allow themselves to be tied and massacred like sheep.’

Better armed than their enemies, the Iroquois undertook the systematic destruction of Huronia in the late 1640s. In 1647 and subsequent years, several Huron villages were moved following repeated Iroquois attacks. In 1648, the village of Saint-Joseph was overwhelmed with a loss of some 700 Huron, mostly taken captive, according to the Jesuits. In the following year, nearly a thousand Iroquois attacked and destroyed the villages of Saint-Louis and Saint-Ignace, burning Gabriel Lallemand and Jean de Brébeuf, the two Jesuits in charge of the missions, on the spot. According to accounts by survivors, the Iroquois won an easy victory at Saint-Ignace:

*The enemy burst in at the break of day, but so secretly and suddenly that they were masters of the place before we could put up a defence, since everyone was sound asleep and had no chance to realize what was occurring. Therefore, the town was taken almost without resistance, with only 10 Iroquois killed, and all the men, women and children were either massacred on the spot or taken captive and doomed to cruelty more terrible than death.*

These repeated hammer blows by the Iroquois, coupled with divisions within Huron society and despair of epidemic diseases, shattered Huron morale. The remaining population decided to abandon the land, burn their villages and disperse. Many decided to surrender and join the League of Five Nations, others took refuge among their Petun, Neutral and Erie neighbours, while still others fled to St. Joseph Island in Georgian Bay. Unfortunately, the island was too small to provide for the needs of the thousands of Huron who took refuge there, and during the following winter several hundred died in a major famine. In 1650, a group of several hundred Christian Huron decided to settle at Quebec City, in the French colony, while the rest of the nation dispersed westward as refugees. The former group originally settled on Île d’Orléans and moved frequently in the following years, finally settling at Lorette (Wendake) in the 1690s.

The Huron were not the only indigenous peoples to feel the power of the Iroquois in the wars that followed. In 1649, the Petun, a nation living south of Georgian Bay, which had supported the Huron against the Iroquois and sheltered many of their refugees, were also attacked. The village of Saint-Jean, where several Jesuits had been living for about 10 years, was besieged and destroyed. Rather than suffer the same fate, the other eight villages in the confederacy decided to flee westward and found refuge on the shores of Green Bay, west of Lake Michigan. The Iroquois then turned their assaults against the Neutral, who as their name suggests had remained

neutral in the conflict between the Huron and the Iroquois. Armies of 1,200 to 1,500 Iroquois warriors destroyed one village in the fall of 1650 and then another in the following winter. Like the Petun, the Neutral survivors preferred to disperse westward rather than risk being massacred and tortured by the Iroquois. Between 1653 and 1657, the Iroquois attacked the Erie, further south, who they also dispersed. Even in the St. Lawrence Valley, the Iroquois achieved significant success. In 1651, the Jesuits reported that Iroquois warriors had travelled up the St. Maurice River and attacked the Attikamekw in their own territory, which had appeared to be virtually inaccessible, and destroyed entire encampments.

The string of Iroquois victories had serious consequences for New France. In military terms, the French found themselves totally isolated: not only were they deprived of the assistance of the Huron — who had previously exerted constant pressure on the western part of Iroquois territory — but also that of their Algonquian allies in the Laurentian region (Algonquin, Attikamekw and Montagnais, who no longer dared frequent the colony for fear of being ambushed by the Iroquois. The defenceless French settlements became a favourite target of the Iroquois. Between 1650 and 1653, they struck everywhere between Montreal and Quebec City, sparing neither settlers who ventured into the woods to hunt nor those working the fields. ‘The Iroquois have wreaked such havoc in these quarters that for time we believed we

would have to return to France,’ wrote Sister Marie de l’Incarnation in 1650. The colony was also in a precarious position economically. Since Aboriginal traders no longer dared travel to the St. Lawrence Valley, the fur returns declined sharply after 1650. Without the revenues from the trade, which by itself had been almost enough to provide for the colony’s needs, New France was no longer able to defend itself against Iroquois incursions.

In 1653, the Iroquois took advantage of the favourable circumstances to negotiate a peace with the French on their own terms. They demanded that French soldiers move into their villages to defend them against their enemies and that the Jesuits build a residence within their lands. As a result, a French outpost was established in 1655 at Onondaga, the capital of the Iroquois League.

For three years, peace reigned between the French and the Iroquois. But in 1658, the French changed their policy towards the Five Nations, abandoned their new mission and returned to the colony, determined to confront the Iroquois and impose a peace, by force of arms if necessary.

When Louis XIV ascended to the throne of France, the situation in New France changed considerably. In 1663, the young king decided to take matters in hand, declared New France a crown colony and sent the Carignan-Salières Regiment, composed of 1,500 regular soldiers under the command of Alexandre de Prouville, Marquis



#### Canadian on snowshoes

Canadian on snowshoes going to war over the snow at the end of the 17th century. This is the only known contemporary illustration of a Canadian militiaman.

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de Tracy, to secure peace with the Iroquois. They landed at Quebec City in the summer of 1665 and began building a series of forts on the Richelieu River, the Iroquois' main route to the St. Lawrence Valley. They also organized two major expeditions against the Iroquois. The first, consisting of 300 men from the regiment and 200 volunteers from the French colonies, left Quebec City on 9 January 1666. The results were disastrous. The soldiers were ill equipped for a winter campaign: most had no snowshoes or did not know how to use them, and were poorly dressed for 'a cold that greatly exceeds the severity of the harshest European winter.' In addition, the army set out hastily, without waiting for its Algonquin guides, who arrived late at the meeting place. This mistake was fatal for the troops, who had to take unknown routes and constantly went off course. The soldiers quickly lost their way. After wandering around the Lake Champlain area for three weeks, they finally arrived at the Dutch village of Schenectady and were happy to receive assistance from the local merchants. During the five-week expedition, nearly 400 soldiers died of hypothermia, hunger and disease.

After this catastrophic campaign, the French realized how dependent they were on their Aboriginal allies to wage war in North America. In October 1666, a second expedition was launched against Iroquois villages, and this time a hundred Aboriginal men were present along with 600 French soldiers and 600 French-Canadian



volunteers. These Aboriginal allies served as guides and also hunted to provide provisions for the troops. This expedition, better prepared than the first, finally reached the Mohawk villages after marching for two weeks. To the dismay of the French, however, the villages were deserted. The Mohawk opted to retreat rather than confront the large French army. The French had to content themselves with setting fire to their villages and crops, before returning to Quebec City.

The French had been engaged in peace talks with four of the Iroquois Five Nations (the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca) since 1663. The arrival of the Carignan-Salières Regiment spurred the negotiations and treaties were ratified by each of the four nations in 1665 and 1666. But the outright refusal of the Mohawk to take part in the discussions opened by the rest of the League prompted the French to continue their incursions into Mohawk territory. When the Mohawk realized that the French were capable of attacking them on their own lands, in their villages, they decided to yield and finally ratified the peace treaty in Quebec City in July 1667. At the time, the Iroquois were at war with the Andaste, an Iroquoian nation in Pennsylvania. Signing the treaty with the French meant they would not have to fight on two fronts at once.

### **The Treaty of 1667: Rebuilding the Franco-Aboriginal alliance**

The Franco-Iroquois peace lasted 15 years. It was a period of growth for New France. The French succeeded in re-establishing their system of alliances in the Great Lakes region. Since the destruction of Huronia by the Iroquois in 1650, only a few intrepid *coureurs de bois* such as Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médart Chouard des Groseillers had dared venture into the region to seek new trading partners. After the 1667 treaty, the route to the Great Lakes became much safer and it was not long before French travellers appeared in the region. The Jesuits also set out to conquer the area, looking for new souls to convert. Beginning in 1665, they established a series of missions in the 'Pays d'en Haut.' The first was called Saint-Esprit and was located at Chagouamigon on Lake Superior.

The nations the French encountered around Lake Superior and Lake Michigan were almost all at war with the Iroquois Five Nations, and occasionally each other. Most of them had fled their lands in the 1650s and 1660s and had taken refuge from the Iroquois further west. They welcomed the arrival of the French as an external arbiter, who had powerful weapons and could protect them. When the adventurer Cavalier de La Salle visited the Potawatomi for the first time in the 1670s, they expressed their reasons for forming an alliance with the





French in these words: ‘You are one of the first spirits for you make iron. You are the one who must rule and protect all men. Praised be the Sun that lights you and has brought you to our land.’

For their part, the French found among Aboriginal peoples excellent trading partners and new allies in the defence of the colony. In keeping with their policy of mediation, they sought to establish peace among all these nations (often described as enemies) and to form a commercial and military alliance with them. To encourage these nations to fight the Iroquois, the French began giving them presents, ingratiating them through the indigenous system of gift-giving diplomacy. The French did not make the same mistake they had with the Huron, and distributed firearms liberally as gifts to both confirm their alliance and arm their new allies. The historian Bacqueville de La Potherie, who stayed in the colony at the end of the 17th Century, described the formation of the Franco-Aboriginal alliance: ‘The French ... had penetrated into their lands imperceptibly ... the union was cemented on both sides; we took their common interests and they declared themselves our friends; we supported them in their wars and they declared themselves in our favour.’

The prolonged contact between the French and Aboriginal peoples in the region had a profound impact on French-Canadian society, particularly on military practices. In

the early 1650s, the French settlers began adopting their allies’ guerrilla tactics to counter more frequent Iroquois attacks. When they started making regular trips to the Great Lakes region and trading extensively with the Aboriginal peoples, the settlers refined those tactics. According to historian Arnould Balvay, in the 1680s the French-Canadians ‘began wearing moccasins, travelled light in order to be more mobile, and fought running battles alongside their Aboriginal allies. As a result of this intermixture, by the end of the 17th Century the Canadians had become capable practitioners of the art of *la petite guerre*.’ When the British attacked Quebec City in 1690, they were beaten back by an outnumbered French-Canadian militia that, according to a contemporary chronicler, was able to prevail by using guerrilla tactics:

*[The French-Canadians] were divided into a number of small platoons and attacked with little order, in the manner of the Savages, this large body [the British] which was in tight ranks. They made one battalion give way and forced it to fall back. The shooting lasted more than an hour as our people flew constantly about the enemy, from tree to tree, and so the furious volleys aimed at them disturbed them little, whereas they fired accurately on people who were all in one body.*



### Iroquois Warrior with musket, c. 1730

This man wears aboriginal clothing but is armed with a French military musket, acquired either through combat or trade, a war axe with an iron blade and a small scalping knife hung around his neck. Note the bayonet on the musket – although aboriginal warriors adopted European weapons, they did not adopt European tactics and were more likely to engage in hit and run ambushes than in stand-up, close quarter fighting.

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Most Europeans were derisive of such relatively bloodless sport. It was “more of a pastime than to conquer or subdue enemies,” Captain John Underhill of Massachusetts Bay concluded after observing one such engagement. However, Europeans were less likely to witness the more common and more deadly raiding and ambushes that characterised the indigenous way of war across the continent. In the northeast woodlands and elsewhere, the advent of European firearms would quickly render such open field combat too costly according to indigenous cultural norms of war. After 1609, most observers reported that Aboriginal people did ‘not know how to fight in open country,’ and accounts of Aboriginal warfare usually described hit and run military techniques, which the French called ‘la petite guerre.’ This was essentially a form of guerrilla warfare, the primary goal of which was to inflict casualties, capture prisoners and take scalps, while suffering as few losses as possible. To do so, the warriors generally moved in small groups and took pains to catch the enemy unawares or encircle it, while eluding the same tactics by the other side. They took advantage of the terrain to remain concealed and ambush the enemy, or slipped into a camp by night to surprise the occupants in their sleep. Once they had achieved their objective, the warriors retreated before a counter-attack could be mounted.

While it suited conditions in the forests of North America, Aboriginal guerrilla warfare was far removed from

Other groups also reorganized their network of alliances after the Franco-Iroquois treaty of 1667. When the British seized control of New Holland in 1664, the Iroquois were cut off from their political and commercial allies. In 1677, when the Iroquois experienced serious difficulties in their war with the Andaste, they formed an alliance with the British similar to their previous pact with the Dutch. Known as the 'Covenant Chain,' it called for mutual assistance by the two allies in the event of war. It also guaranteed the Iroquois preferred access to the British market and a role as intermediaries in Anglo-Aboriginal relations.

### **Abenaki Wars, 1675-1678 and 1687-1697**

While the Iroquois Wars were shaping the development of the French colony in the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes region, another war was being waged between the Mi'kmaq and the Abenaki in Acadia. Champlain built the first French settlement in the Maritimes in 1604 on Île Sainte-Croix. The following year, it was moved to Port-Royal (Annapolis Royal), which became the centre of the Acadian colony. At the time, the Mi'kmaq, an Algonquian nation that had hostile relations with the Abenaki who lived in neighbouring Maine and Massachusetts, inhabited the region. By 1604, the French had established trading relations with the Mi'kmaq, who made use of French weaponry such as metal arrowheads, swords and even firearms to fight the Abenaki.

In the 1620s, however, the geopolitical situation in Acadia changed quickly. After the 1624 treaty between the Iroquois and the nations of the St. Lawrence Valley, the Mi'kmaq and the Abenaki became the targets of Iroquois raids. This development helped reduce tensions between the Mi'kmaq and the Abenaki, and it induced the Abenaki to open negotiations with the French for a commercial and military alliance. The first overture was made in 1629, when an Abenaki delegate travelled to Quebec City to seek Champlain's aid against the Iroquois and propose a close friendship between their nations. Since Champlain was unable to provide the Abenaki with concrete assistance at that time, nothing came of the proposed alliance until 1651, when the Jesuit Gabriel Druillette visited the Abenaki to enlist them into a common front against the Iroquois.

In 1654, Acadia fell to the British. The French did not recover the territory until 1670, and they established a new post in Abenaki territory at the mouth of the Penobscot River (now Castine, Maine). In the following years, the Jesuits and the Récollets founded a number of missions among the Abenaki and the Mi'kmaq, while a number of the small and largely male population of French settlers married Aboriginal women. The Franco-Abenaki alliance, which had been shaky up to that point, quickly became firmer.

The Baron de Saint-Castin exemplified the close alliance that developed between the French and the Abenaki during this period. A young soldier who came to Canada with the Carignan-Salières Regiment, Jean-Vincent d'Abadie de Saint-Castin became the lover of a Aboriginal woman named Pidianske, who was the daughter of Madockawando, an important Abenaki chief of the Penobscot nation. Initially, relations between Saint-Castin and the Abenaki were of a purely commercial nature. But after a few years, the Baron decided to settle among the Abenaki, where he acquired considerable political power.

In 1675, King Philip's War (in reference to the English name of Metacom, the Wampanoeg chief against whom the Plymouth Puritans initiated hostilities) broke out between the British colonies of New England and most of the Algonquin nations on the east coast of North America, including the Abenaki and the Mi'kmaq. The cause of the war was the expansion of the British colonies into Aboriginal lands. It ended with the destruction of most of the Aboriginal nations in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and the exodus of thousands of Abenaki. Some took refuge at Pentagoët with Saint-Castin and his allies, while others travelled to the St. Lawrence Valley and joined members of their community who had withdrawn to the Jesuit mission in Sillery in the 1660s, after the Iroquois wars. The Jesuits recorded the arrival of a large number of refugees:

*When the war that the Abenaki had with the English began, many of them decided to withdraw to the land inhabited by the French .... Two nations principally, namely those called the Sokoki and the Abenaki, carried out this plan and set out at the beginning of summer in the year 1675. The Sokoki headed for Trois-Rivières, where they settled, and the Abenaki ... withdrew to this place called Sillery.*

Following King Philip's War, the British began encroaching on Abenaki and Mi'kmaq land. Settlers from New England started fishing off the Acadian coast, seized Aboriginal hunting grounds, and built forts there for defence. In 1687, another war – often called King William's War – resumed between the British and Aboriginal groups. During this conflict, the French supplied the Abenaki and the Mi'kmaq with weapons to fight the British, supported them in some battles, and continued to take in refugees fleeing the war. The population of Sillery grew so rapidly that the mission soon became overcrowded. One Abenaki group, primarily from Maine, settled at Sault de la Chaudière near Quebec City, and then moved again to the mouth of the St. François River (Odanak) in 1700. Abenaki from Vermont (known as the Sokoki) chose to relocate their village to Bécancour (Wolinak) on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. Like the Iroquois missions, these Abenaki villages served French policy. Father Charlevoix



reported that ‘the Governor General’s intention, in creating this settlement, was to fashion a barrier against the Iroquois, in case those Savages should be persuaded by the English to resume the war.’ They also served Abenaki interests, providing security from their enemies to the south while allowing Abenaki warriors to range freely against English settlers.

In Acadia, Aboriginal hostility to the British persisted until the end of the French Regime in 1760 and was at the core of the Franco-Aboriginal alliance that lasted until that date. In 1697, when the British were seeking peace with the Abenaki, the latter clearly expressed their opposition to British colonial expansion and their attachment to the French. The Abenaki chief demanded, as a condition for peace,

- 1. That he [the British Governor] begin by withdrawing the English from their land forever.*
- 2. That they [the Abenaki] did not see on what grounds he claimed to be their master; that neither he nor any of his predecessors had ever been, that they had given themselves to the King of France willingly and without being forced to do so, and they would never take orders from anyone other than him and his generals.*

- 3. That they would never allow the English to have habitations on their lands and they had granted this permission to the French alone.*

### **Resumption of the Iroquois Wars: 1684-1701**

After a 15-year lull, hostilities between the French and the Iroquois broke out again in the 1680s, when the Seneca (the League’s westernmost nation) began robbing French *coureurs de bois* and attacking the Illinois, a new ally of the French. It is likely that, as in the 1640s, the Iroquois resumed the war out of a desire to take captives and to increase their supply of furs. They were particularly irritated by the French policy of mediation, however, which ran directly counter to Iroquois hegemonic ambitions. An Iroquois chief’s comments, reported by the Jesuits in 1670, expressed the extent of their frustration:

*They ask, who does Onontio [the French Governor] take us for? He is angry that we are going to war: he wants us to lay down our hatchets and leave his allies in peace. Who are his allies? How does he expect us to recognize them, when he claims to take under his protection all the peoples discovered by those who go to spread the word of God across all these lands, and when every day, according to what we hear from our people who escape the cruel fires, they make*

*new discoveries and enter into nations that have never been anything but enemies to us?*

Meanwhile, thanks to their new alliance with the British, the Iroquois had vanquished the Andaste in the late 1670s. With that pressure removed and with the support of the British, the Iroquois were now able to resume their raids against the French and their allies.

In this new phase of the conflict, the Aboriginal allies — those living at missions in the St. Lawrence Valley and those in the Great Lakes region — played an important role. Among other things, they took part in many expeditions organized by the French against Iroquois villages. In 1684, when the Governor, Le Febvre de La Barre, launched an attack against the Seneca, 378 “mission Indian” warriors, including Iroquois, Abenaki, Algonquin, Nipissing and Huron men from Lorette, accompanied his 680-man contingent. About 1,000 Aboriginal warriors from the Great Lakes region were expected to join the expedition, along with a hundred French *coureurs de bois*. The expedition was a failure in the end: suffering from fever and short of provisions, the French troops never reached Iroquois territory. La Barre was forced to sign a peace treaty with the Iroquois that was ‘shameful’ for New France and he abandoned his Illinois allies.

After this failure, La Barre was recalled to France. His successor, René Brisay de Denonville, a professional

soldier, launched an attack against the Seneca in 1687, and once again Aboriginal peoples played an important role in the campaign. This time, at least 300 “mission Indians” and another 400 from the Great Lakes region marched alongside 1,800 French soldiers and militiamen. According to the Baron de Lahontan, who took part in the expedition, the allied warriors came to the rescue of the French troops when they fell into an Iroquois ambush:

*Our battalions were quickly split into small groups, which ran in all directions in a disorderly jumble, not knowing where they were going. We shot at each other instead of shooting at the Iroquois.... Finally, we were so confused that the enemy fell upon us with clubs, when our Savages, gathered together, pushed them back and pursued them so zealously to their villages that they killed more than 80, whose heads they brought back, not counting the wounded who escaped.*

The Denonville expedition, like that of the Marquis de Tracy two decades earlier, was only a half-victory for the French. When they reached the Seneca, the French troops found the villages abandoned: ‘The only benefit we obtained from this great enterprise was that we laid waste the entire countryside, which caused a great famine among the Iroquois and caused many of them to

perish subsequently.’ It was clearer to the French than ever before that they needed their Aboriginal partners to wage war in the forests of North America. ‘Since we cannot destroy the Iroquois with our forces alone,’ wrote Lahontan, ‘we are absolutely forced to have recourse to our allied Savages.’

The Iroquois, who had avoided directly attacking the French colony to that point, responded to the Denonville expedition by launching a large-scale raid against the village of Lachine, close to Montreal, on 5 August 1689. About 1,500 warriors took the French inhabitants by surprise at dawn, while they were asleep. The casualty figures are contradictory: from 200 French killed and 120 taken prisoner, to conservative estimates of 24 French dead and 70 prisoners. The Iroquois also set fire to barns and homes before withdrawing to torture and burn at the stake some of their captives. In the following years, numerous small Iroquois war parties invaded New France, armed and encouraged by the British, who were at war with the French at the time. The Iroquois struck everywhere — La Chesnaye, Île Jésus, Verchères — killing or capturing the inhabitants.

In the hope of putting an end to the raids, the French struck back by launching more military expeditions into Iroquois territory. In January 1693, Huron from Lorette, Abenaki from Sault de la Chaudière, and Algonquin and Sokoki from Trois-Rivières, accompanied French

soldiers in a raid against the Mohawk. For the first time, the French did not find deserted villages. They succeeded in taking three villages by surprise and capturing more than 300 prisoners. This victory revealed that they had begun to master guerrilla tactics. In 1696, 500 Aboriginal warriors and approximately 1,600 French soldiers and Canadian militiamen mounted a last expedition against Onondaga and Oneida villages. The Comte de Frontenac, who was 74 years old and had to be carried through the woods on a chair, led them. Once again, the Iroquois withdrew before the arrival of the army and the French had to content themselves with destroying the crops and the villages, a practice that had become almost a ritual.

While some Aboriginal nations supported the French against the Iroquois, they were not unconditional allies and set limits on their involvement in the war. The Iroquois living at Sault and La Montagne were generally disinclined to kill their Five Nations cousins, with whom they preserved cordial relations. After the 1693 expedition against the Mohawk villages, for example, the French demanded that the 300 prisoners be put to death, so they should not become a burden on the journey home. But the several Iroquois from Sault Saint-Louis who were present were fiercely opposed to the plan:

*The Savages argued that they were responsible for the prisoners and they would never consent to slay them, although they had promised to do*

*so ... when they left Montreal ... These sorts of nations do not govern themselves as others do. They readily promise what is asked of them, and decide later whether to do it according to what their interests (which they do not always know) or their whims suggest.*

The “mission” Iroquois proved to be much more useful as diplomatic intermediaries between the French and the Five Nations, carrying peace proposals back and forth.

The Aboriginal peoples in the Great Lakes region fought not only because the Iroquois were their traditional enemies. They also served as allies because the French sustained their relationship through generous annual distributions of gifts. According to the French officer Gédéon de Catalogne, ‘We sent large presents to all the Odahwah nations to induce them to harass the Iroquois and divert them from their course.’ When the presents were lacking, these nations, who were increasingly dependent on these gifts for a steady supply of shot and powder, were quite dissatisfied and the French western alliance faltered. In 1697, the Potawatomi chief Onanguice complained:

*that we generally promised them [the Aboriginal peoples] much more than we apparently intended to give them; that we had often assured them that we would not leave them short*

*of munitions and we had supplied them with none for more than a year; that the English did not deal in this manner with the Iroquois; and if we continued abandoning them in this way, they would no longer be seen at Montreal.*

These were not empty threats, for the Aboriginal peoples of the Great Lakes region conducted ongoing secret negotiations with the Iroquois on ending the war and joining their Covenant Chain. For example, in 1696 Canadian authorities contended that such negotiations were under way between the Iroquois, the Huron and possibly other nations:

*Most of the nations [in the Great Lakes region], at least the Huron, tired of attending to our interests, welcomed the Iroquois delegates. The policy [of the Iroquois], who were not dispirited by the obstacles they encountered in all their attempts, was so grand that they skilfully insinuated themselves into the minds of many of our Allies, who had until then shown great concern for our interests. They began holding their Councils in secret without informing the Commander of Michilimakinak, and they accepted the Iroquois’ necklaces.*

Despite these diplomatic manoeuvrings, the western allies played an important role in the Franco-Iroquois



war. According to historian Gilles Havard, they were the main factor in the defeat of the Iroquois in the late 1690s. They conducted a flurry of raids against the Iroquois in parties generally consisting of dozens or even a hundred warriors. The colonial authorities reported that in 1692 alone, ‘all the Great Lakes nations ... had more than 800 men detached in small parties that were at the gates of the Iroquois villages every day or harassed them on their hunting grounds.’ These tactics ‘disturbed them more than can be said.’ The historian Bacqueville de La Potherie, who was in the colony in the late 17th Century, wrote of the nations of the Great Lakes region:

*When these nations abandon our interests it will be a catastrophe for Canada. They are its support and shield. They are the ones that rein in the Iroquois on all the hunting expeditions they must make away from their homes in order to survive. Moreover, they carry iron and fire into the heart of Iroquois country.*

As a result of the raids by the Great Lakes nations, alongside disastrous epidemics, the Iroquois population fell by half between 1689 and 1697. In addition, when the Treaty of Ryswick ended the war between the French and the British in 1697, the Iroquois lost the support of their British allies in their war against New France. Isolated, weakened and alarmed by the growing military might of the French, who had carried the war to most

of their villages, the Iroquois signed the Great Peace of Montreal on 4 August 1701. Historians long argued that the Iroquois were forced to accept conditions dictated by the French in 1701. Some writers, such as Francis Jennings and William Eccles, have even described the Great Peace as an Iroquois surrender. But in fact the treaty of 1701 was essentially a compromise between the French and the Iroquois. In the negotiations that led to the signing of the treaty, which lasted more than five years, the Iroquois wrested major concessions from the French. Among other things, they demanded that the French Governor pledge to defend them if the Aboriginal peoples from the Great Lakes region continued their raids against them. The Governor agreed, specifying that before committing troops to a conflict he would seek to obtain reasonable satisfaction for the victim of the attack by diplomatic means. In exchange for this undertaking, the Iroquois promised to remain neutral in any French-British conflict.

### **Fox Wars, 1712-1714 and 1730-1735**

Aboriginal wars continued to play a decisive role in the military history of New France, even during the periods of peace between France and the British, into the 18th Century. The Fox War is a good example of a conflict that helped both reaffirm and threaten the Franco-Aboriginal alliance.



**Expedition against the Iroquois, 1695**

Count Frontenac, Governor of New France still active at the age of 74, is seen here carried in a canoe during the expedition he led against the Iroquois in 1695.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-6430)*



The Fox lived southeast of Lake Michigan on the river that still bears their name. They came into contact with the French in the late 1660s. At the time, the Fox nation had hostile relations with many allies of the French. For some 40 years, however, influential figures, such as the well-known *coureur de bois* and fort commander Nicolas Perrot, were able to step in between these nations and keep the peace. In 1710, the Fox moved their village close to the French fort of Detroit, where a heterogeneous Aboriginal community was already gathered. Ancient quarrels then resurfaced and were aggravated by the arrogant attitude of the Fox towards their new neighbours. Tensions between the different nations quickly mounted and in 1712 a group of Odahwah attacked the Mascouten, close allies of the Fox. The Mascouten took refuge at Detroit among the Fox, who defended them and mounted a counter-attack against the Odahwah. Most of the nations in the region (Huron, Miami, Illinois, Potawatomi ...) joined forces with the Odahwah and laid siege to the Fox and the Mascouten. The latter asked the French commander at Detroit for assistance several times but he refused. During the 19-day siege, nearly 1,000 Fox and Mascouten were killed or taken prisoner by the allies.

In the following years, France's Aboriginal allies frequently asked the Governor, Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, to send soldiers westward to help them 'destroy' the Fox. Vaudreuil, whose people were at war

with the British at the time, initially tried to mediate and to alleviate the conflict, suggesting to his allies that 'if ... the Fox ask you for peace, I believe it would be more fitting to grant it than to wage a war that may last a long time and cause much pain and grief in your villages.' The Fox, however, soon resumed their raids against the allies, particularly the Illinois, and against the French *coureurs de bois*. The Canadian authorities were therefore forced to send troops west in the hope of overawing the recalcitrant Fox. In 1716, some 450 French soldiers and 350 Aboriginal warriors led by Louis Laporte de Louvigny, an officer of the *Troupes de la Marine*, travelled as far as Wisconsin, where they attacked the main Fox village. Louvigny reported that 'after three days of digging trenches under cover of steady fire by the fusiliers, two canons and a grenade mortar, they [the Fox] were reduced to suing for peace, although there were 500 warriors in the fort who were shooting ably and more than 3,000 women.'

Though Louvigny claimed in 1716 to have 'left this country entirely at peace,' the Fox continued their raids against the Illinois and the French. Knowing that 'war with the Savages [did] not suit [the] colony in its current state, without troops and without money,' the French again attempted diplomacy in order to restore peace in the Great Lakes region. Their efforts consistently foundered on the Aboriginal refusal to cease hostilities. Therefore, 'after having [unsuccessfully] attempted the

gentle approach,' the French resolved in the 1720s to 'entirely destroy' and 'exterminate' the Fox. In 1730, when the Fox were on their way to take refuge among the Iroquois, they were intercepted by a group of Illinois warriors, who engaged them in combat and forced them to hole up in a makeshift fort. The Illinois were soon joined by Aboriginal people from nearly all the nations in the Great Lakes region, as well as Iroquois and Huron living at the missions and the Sauk and Wea, former allies of the Fox. In all, nearly 1,100 fighters (of whom only about 100 were French) gathered to lay siege to the Fox. The Fox attempted to negotiate several times but the French commander, Robert Groston de Saint-Ange, refused. After more than one month of siege, the Fox attempted to sneak out under cover of a stormy night, but their enemies, who gave them no quarter, quickly intercepted them. At the end of the battle, more than 500 Fox lay dead and many others had been taken captive, some of whom were sent to France to be imprisoned while the others were tortured or adopted by their enemies.

In 1735, a final French campaign was mounted against the Fox. In the eyes of the western allies, however, the Fox had been sufficiently punished for their arrogance and hostility to their neighbours, and the French determination to annihilate the Fox people was excessive and deplorable. Most of the nations refused to fight alongside the French army, preferring to 'live in peace and hunt to [feed] their women and children.' The few Aboriginal

warriors who accompanied the 84 French to Iowa (mostly 'mission' Iroquois) refused to fight once they reached their destination, causing the expedition to fail. In a letter to the Minister of Colonies, the Governor of the day, Charles de La Boische de Beauharnois, explained the motives of the Aboriginal people in these terms:

*You may well believe, my Lord, that the Savages have their policies as we have ours, and they are reluctant to see a nation destroyed for fear their turn will come next. They show the French great eagerness and then behave altogether differently. We have recent evidence of this on the part of the Odahwah, who asked for mercy for the Sauk, although it was in their interest to avenge the death of their people and of their Grand Chief.*

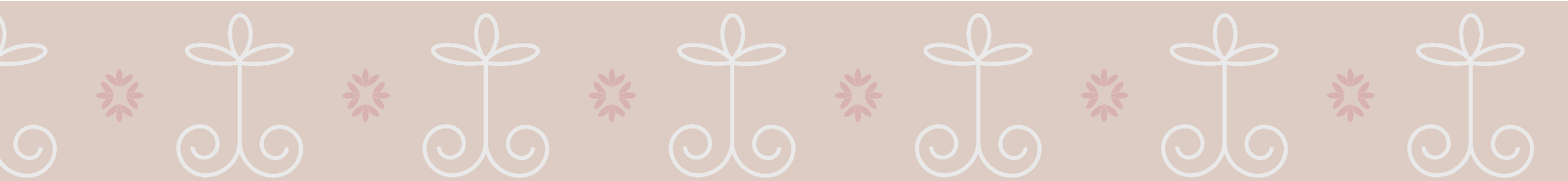
The Governor added: 'The Savages generally fear the French but they do not like them and nothing of what they exhibit to the French is sincere.'







## Chapter Two



# The Imperial Wars

After 1689, imperial rivalries between France and England began exerting an increasingly significant influence on North American politics. King William's War (1689-1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) all stemmed primarily from European antagonisms. External developments had little direct influence on already-existing alliances, but new rivalries were superimposed over ancient Aboriginal conflicts and gradually came to overshadow them.

In 1689, at the beginning of the imperial wars, New France had approximately 12,000 inhabitants, while the British colonies to the south had a population of more than 250,000. Seventy years later, at the time of the Conquest, Canada's population was still only 70,000 inhabitants, while that of the Thirteen Colonies was more than 1.5 million. The British colonies were confined to a narrow strip along the Atlantic coast, while New France stretched from Acadia to Louisiana to what became the Canadian Prairies. To compensate for their demographic and geo-strategic weakness, the French had to rely on their Aboriginal allies. Largely thanks to them, New France was able to survive until 1760. While they supported the French in their battles, however, Aboriginal peoples did not become mere instruments of

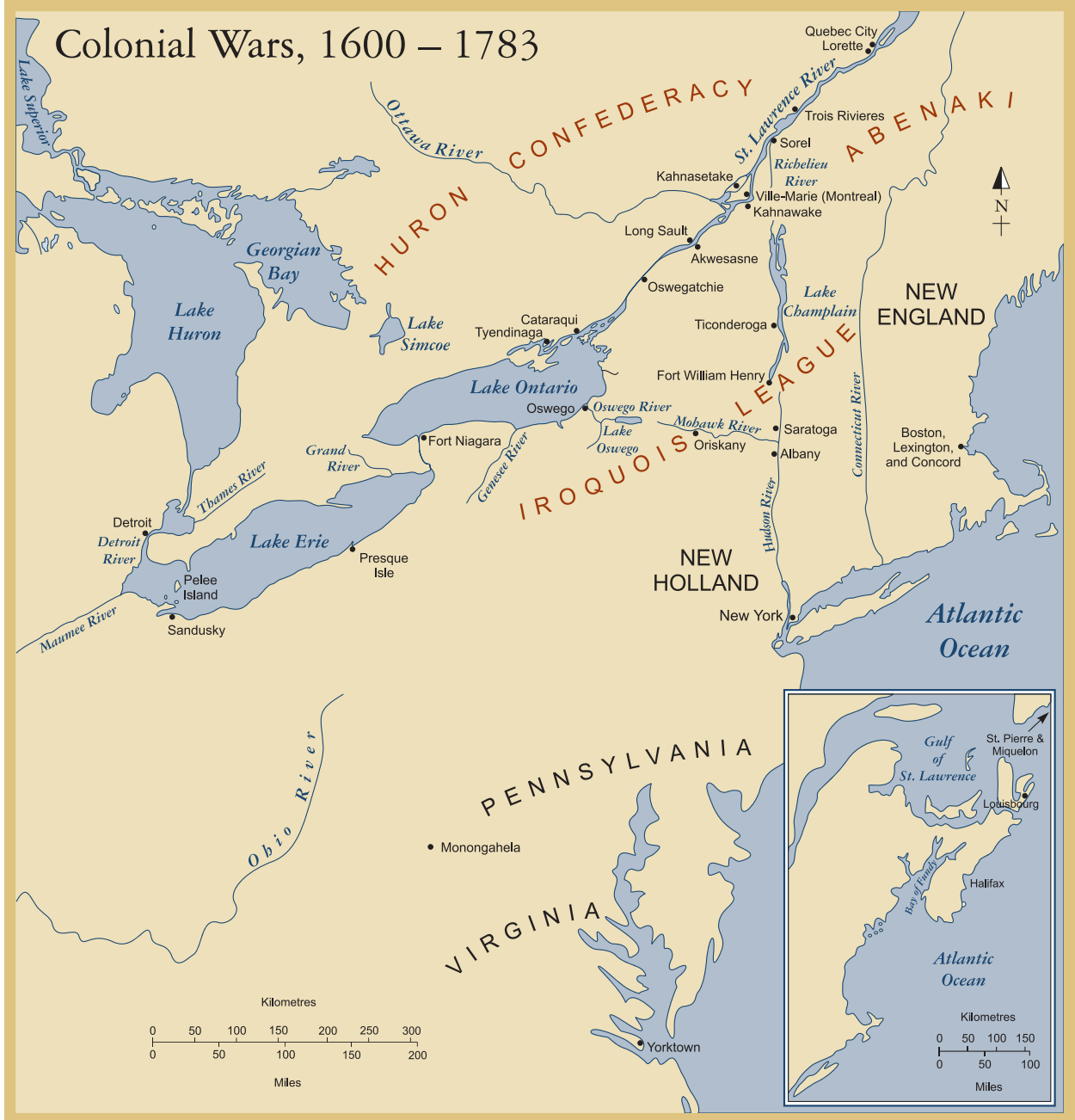
French imperialism. They also continued defending their own interests.

## King William's War, 1689-1697

The expansionist policy of King Louis XIV of France led to King William's War between France and an English-Dutch-Austrian alliance in the late 17th Century. The conflict spilled over into the Americas, beginning with the arrival of the Comte de Frontenac in Canada in 1689. The Governor's initial plan was to conquer the British colony of New York. He hoped that this would isolate the Iroquois and force them to stop their raids on New France. When Frontenac arrived in New France it was too late in the season to carry out this plan and he had to settle for less ambitious projects.

### Iroquois chief between 1760-1790

Reconstitution by G.A. Embleton [Parks Canada]



In the month of January 1690, the French organized three expeditions against the British colonies of New England. Under the leadership of French-Canadian officers of the Troupes de la Marine, such as Jean-Baptiste Hertel de Rouville and Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, parties composed of both Canadian militiamen and Aboriginal warriors attacked British villages and forts. Their tactics wed surprise attack and siege warfare in an effective combination of Aboriginal guerrilla tactics and European techniques. The first detachment, composed of 96 Iroquois warriors and 114 French-Canadians, left Montreal and headed due south to attack the village of Schenectady. The allies arrived on 9 February in the middle of the night and launched a surprise attack on the inhabitants: 'The war cry rang was sounded in the manner of the Savages and everyone attacked at once.' The houses were set aflame, the entire garrison was put to the sword, and all who tried to defend themselves were killed. Only 50 old people, women and children managed to escape and survived. Thirty Iroquois who were in the village at the time were also spared: 'They were made to understand that our argument was only with the English.' The large number of "mission" Iroquois among the French troops undoubtedly accounted for the conciliatory attitude towards these resident Iroquois. The second party consisted of 25 French-Canadians and 25 Abenaki and Algonquin from Sillery. It headed for the settlement of Salmon Falls in New Hampshire, where it arrived on 27 March. The contingent attacked three

small forts, took 54 British prisoners and 'withdrew for fear of falling into the hands of 200 English ... who were pursuing it.' It joined up with the third detachment, composed of 50 French-Canadians and 60 Abenaki from the Saint-François mission, who had set out from Quebec City for the Casco Bay area in Maine. Other Abenaki from Acadia joined the group. In the end, 400 to 500 warriors and 75 French-Canadians marched together on Fort Loyal and laid siege to the post. According to one account,

*The trench was opened on the night of the 28th [of May]. Our Canadians and our Savages were not greatly experienced in the art of laying siege to a place. They did not stop working vigorously and by good fortune they had found in abandoned forts tools suitable for moving earth. The work advanced with such speed that ... by the next morning ... we would have arrived by trench at their palisades and set them on fire with a barrel of tar we had also found and some other combustible materials. Seeing this apparatus coming near and being unable to prevent it ... [the British] raised the white flag to surrender.*

In addition to these major expeditions, Aboriginal groups also launched small individual raids on border villages in the British colonies, from which they brought back





scalps and sold them to the French. The French encouraged the practice with the aim of weakening the British and sowing terror among the British settlers, but were soon overwhelmed by the effectiveness of the Aboriginal warriors. Gédéon de Catalogne reported:

*To induce our Savages not to reconcile with the English, Mr. de Frontenac promised them 10 écus for each scalp they brought back, and as a result we always had parties in the field and often scalps, from whom we could learn nothing. Therefore, the order was subsequently changed, which is to say that a low price was paid for scalps but for each prisoner we gave 20 écus (that is, those that were captured around Boston or Orange [Albany]) and for those from the countryside, 10 écus, in order to have reliable news [about the British colonies].*

Finally, the allies of the French also helped defend the colony against the British. After the attacks on Schenectady, Salmon Falls and Casco Bay, the British responded by launching two expeditions against New France. The first was an impressive naval expedition against Quebec City in 1690, in which indigenous allies do not appear to have been involved. Aboriginal war parties did, however, take part in the second, which was launched the following year by the Mayor of Albany, Peter Schuyler, against the fort at La Prairie-de-La-Magdelaine. A group of Odahwah, Algonquin from

Témiscamingues, Huron from Lorette and Iroquois from Sault Saint-Louis fought alongside the French to repel a mixed enemy contingent of approximately 270 New York militiamen and 150 Mohegan and Five Nations warriors.

In Acadia, hostilities had resumed between the maritime Algonquians and the British even before King William's War broke out. In 1688, the Abenaki responded to British encroachment and set out to attack most of the British settlements along the Atlantic coast of Maine, vowing that 'neither they, nor their children, nor their children's children would ... ever make [peace] with the Englishman, who had so often betrayed them'. In 1692, they succeeded in driving the British out of Fort Pemaquid (now Bristol, Maine), after which they pillaged and razed the settlement. Meanwhile, the Mi'kmaq attacked the British boats that came to fish along their coasts. In 1696, it was reported that Mi'kmaq from the St. John River, joined by several Abenaki from Pentagoët,

*... set out in canoes to the number of 70 for a raid on the English; as they proceeded along the coast they encountered a small English vessel which they attacked and captured .... The Indians took their prize into Pentagoët river, pillaged her of all merchandise and money amounting to 1000 or 1200 livres, which they found on board, and held her crew of 7 Englishmen as prisoners.*

The conflict between the French and British was superimposed on the ancient rivalry, creating a new dynamic in the war waged by the Mi'kmaq and the Abenaki. For example, the Mi'kmaq, who proved skilful in privateering, began appearing as buccaneers on French ships. Thanks to the missionaries and the settlers who were now living in Aboriginal villages, the French were able to turn Anglo-Aboriginal hostility to their advantage. The Baron de Saint-Castin in particular played an important role in the war, so much so that the New England settlers called the conflict 'Saint-Castin's War.' In the winter of 1690, for example, he urged his Abenaki allies to join with the Franco-Aboriginal force attacking the village of Casco Bay. Then, in 1695, he persuaded the Abenaki and the Mi'kmaq to join Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville's fleet and lay siege to Fort Pemaquid, which the British had just rebuilt. Among other things, the indigenous men prepared the way so the French troops could pull the canon and mortar from the ships to the fort.

While the alliance with the French lent the Aboriginal nations support in their own war with the British, it was also at times an obstacle to the promotion of their interests. For example, in 1693, Abenaki chiefs attempted to negotiate a peace with the British but the French made every effort to sabotage the talks, inducing their Aboriginal allies to take up the hatchet again.

## The War of the Spanish Succession, 1702-1713

The War of the Spanish Succession was in some ways a continuation of King William's War. In 1700, King Charles II of Spain died without issue and ceded his crown to Philip of Anjou, the grandson of Louis XIV. To prevent the French and Spanish thrones from being unified,



Mi'kmaq warrior c. 1740

Reconstitution by Francis Back. Fortress Louisbourg [Parks Canada]

England, the Netherlands and Austria renewed their alliance and declared war on France on 13 May 1702.

When news of the war reached North America in the fall of 1702, the Abenaki voiced their intent to remain neutral. Deprived of his valuable allies, French governor Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil organized a raid on the villages of Casco and Wells in New England the following year, strongly encouraging the Abenaki to join him. Although few of them heeded his call and the troops were made up primarily of Canadians and mission Iroquois, the British authorities immediately reacted by declaring war on the Abenaki, who were thus drawn into the conflict against their will. Imperial rivalries slowly began to redefine Aboriginal conflicts.

In the ensuing years, the Abenaki continued to attack British posts in Maine and Massachusetts. In 1708, 60 Abenaki joined 100 French and 220 mission Iroquois in a raid on the village of Haverhill. They also helped repel the British attacks on Port Royal in 1707 and 1708. A third attack, in 1710, was successful and the town fell into British hands. When the war ended in 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht ceded Acadia to England according to its 'ancient boundaries.' Both Mi'kmaq and Abenaki were furious upon learning the French had surrendered their traditional territories in the treaty, lands that in their view the French had no right to dispose of, and which they had no intention of leaving. To solidify their rights

over their newly conquered territory, the British rapidly set up a few posts in Acadia. At first the Abenaki anger with the French and desire for more competitive fur prices ensured that they greeted the British settlements peacefully. However, the French were not happy with British expansion into territory they hoped one day to recover and thus attempted to rebuild their relationship with the Abenaki and Mi'kmaq. In time, they were able to do so, and through their missionaries in Acadia (including Father Sébastien Râle, who lived among the Abenaki of Narantsuak, and Father Antoine Gaulin, who lived among the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq). French encouragement and British provocations led to a rekindling of Abenaki and Mi'kmaq hostilities with the British. In 1716, the French king even set up a special fund of 2,000 pounds to fund the distribution of annual gifts to the Abenaki and Mi'kmaq.

The Anglo-Abenaki war did not flair anew until 1722, but the Mi'kmaq began boarding British vessels fishing in their waters in 1715: they captured nearly 40 vessels between 1715 and 1722. As anthropologist Harrald Prins wrote:

*Each summer, to the resentment of the French, some 200 New England vessels fished off the Nova Scotia coast. From 1715 to 1722, Mi'kmaq seafighters harassed this fleet. Armed and encouraged by their French allies entrenched*





**Etow oh Kowan, an Iroquois Chief, 1710**

In aboriginal, as in white society, political and military status was indicated by elaborate clothing and insignia. This Iroquois chief, prominent around 1700, is depicted dressed for formal occasion in a mixture of aboriginal and white garments. Note that he is holding a war club but also carries a decorated European sword in a scabbard, possibly presented to him as a ceremonial gift by either the French or English crowns.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-092421)*

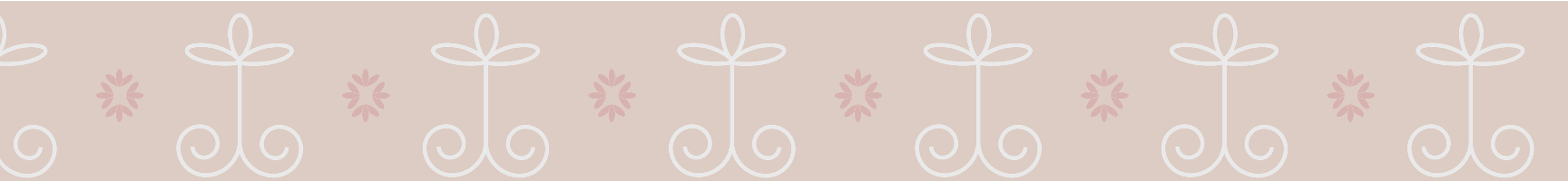






**Mi'kmaq chief c. 1740**

*Reconstitution by Francis Back, Fortress Louisbourg [Parks Canada]*



*at Cape Breton, they formed an intrepid force of about 60 marines. Cruising along their coasts in shallops, or sometimes paddling their swift canoes, they searched for ketches and schooners hailing from distant ports. Especially when anchored in some cove, these British vessels were easy targets for surprise attack. Falling upon their prey, Mi'kmaq would try to board the vessel and surprise the crew. Rather than killing the fishermen, the Mi'kmaq preferred to take them alive for ransom. Plundering whatever was deemed valuable, including the cargo of dried fish, they would bring their spoil to French settlements for sale.*

It must not be supposed that these Aboriginal warriors were acting simply as mercenaries on behalf of the French. On the contrary, they were primarily seeking to protect their own interests and their lands. When the British tried to explain to the Abenaki that the Treaty of Utrecht made them British subjects, one Abenaki chief replied that 'the King of France can dispose of what belongs to him; as for him, he had his land, where God had placed him, and as long as there was one child of his nation alive, he would fight to keep it.' Settler penetration into the interior and into Abenaki lands was the spark for renewed fighting, with the western Abenaki sagamore Grey Lock effectively sweeping settlers from what is now New Hampshire and parts of Vermont with a highly effective

guerrilla campaign based out of the Green Mountains. Further east the war went against the Abenaki. When the war finally ended in 1726, the Abenaki and Mi'kmaq signed treaties with the British, recognizing the British right to settle on Aboriginal territory.

While Massachusetts was seriously affected by the Franco-Aboriginal attacks, the colony of New York was mostly spared by the war. The Canadian and New York authorities informally agreed at the outset of hostilities to remain neutral. This agreement primarily served the interests of the Aboriginal peoples and in fact was negotiated by the Iroquois, who likely wanted to avoid being dragged into the conflict by the British and having to face raids by the French and their allies again. As they explained to the French governor:

*You Europeans are evil spirits, said one Iroquois chief. You quarrel in God's name and take up the hatchet for petty things. We on the other hand do not take up the hatchet unless we see blood being shed and heads being cut off. To prevent this from happening, I am taking up my father Onontio's hatchet and have asked my brother Corlard [the governor of New York] to take his and we shall bury them both in the pit where my late father Onontio cast them when he made the great peace.*



The mission Iroquois (particularly those from Sault St. Louis) also benefited greatly from the truce, which allowed them to travel freely to Albany, where their furs commanded higher prices than in Montreal. Significant clandestine trading between Montreal and Albany ensued as the Iroquois started bringing furs purchased from Montreal merchants to the New York capital. The Canadian authorities turned a blind eye to the illicit trade, since it allowed the colony to dispose of its surplus furs and purchase goods it otherwise could not.

### **War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748**

With the Treaty of Utrecht, signed in 1713, France and England remained at peace until 1744. For 30 years, there was no conflict between New France and the British colonies. However, peace did not extinguish imperial ambitions and the Anglo-French rivalry in North America continued unabated. Governor Vaudreuil's deal-making to encourage the Mi'kmaq and Abenaki to resist British expansion into Acadia is a clear illustration of that rivalry. To compensate for their loss of territory, the French built the fortress of Louisbourg, one of the largest military establishments ever built in North America, on Île Royale (Cape Breton Island). They hoped to defend Canada against possible British invasion and protect their interest in the east coast fishery. The British, on the other hand, took advantage of the peace to establish trade ties with the Great Lakes nations, hoping to destabilize the

Franco-Aboriginal alliance, among other things. Slowly, British traders even began to venture into the Ohio region, where many Aborigines had returned to after the Peace of Montreal and the waning of Iroquois power.

The War of the Austrian Succession began in 1740, when England declared war on Prussia, which wanted the throne of young Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. Four years later, France joined Prussia and Spain against England, once again dragging America into war. This time, the French had great difficulty garnering the support of their Aboriginal allies in fighting the British. In 1745, Governor Charles La Boische de Beauharnois complained of the "mission Indians'" lack of interest in fighting the British. As he put it, 'the village of Sault St. Louis would readily remain neutral.' Obviously, the mission Iroquois' best interests lay in maintaining neutrality with the colony of New York, so they could protect their lucrative fur trade. Faced with the lack of enthusiasm, the governor assembled a party of 200 French-Canadians under the command of Paul Marin de La Malgue to 'descend on the coast near Boston.' They were joined by 300 or 400 mission Iroquois and Abenaki. In the end, the party changed its destination and attacked the village of Saratoga, taking a hundred prisoners in the process. The following year, Pierre-François de Rigaud de Vaudreuil led a detachment of 400 French and 300 mission and Great Lakes warriors against Fort Massachusetts (Adams, Massachusetts). According to one

observer, 'The party wreaked havoc, burning down all the settlements and crops they could find within 15 leagues, including barns, mills, churches, tanneries, etc.' Even as they took part in the French military activities, however, the indigenous nations were trying to protect their interests. The Iroquois from the Sault and the Lake of Two Mountains, for instance, were very reluctant to continue scouting along the New York border, for fear of coming into conflict with their brothers in the League.

Only the Mi'kmaq and Abenaki were eager to go to war against the British. Encouraged once again by their missionaries, the two nations took part in two sieges on the town of Annapolis Royal in 1744 and 1745, both of which were unsuccessful. In 1745, the British captured the citadel of Louisbourg, which the French had believed was impregnable. Hoping to recapture the fortress, the French launched two expeditions, with the assistance of hundreds of Abenaki and Mi'kmaq, but to no avail. The allies had greater success on Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island) in 1746, when a 100 or so Mi'kmaq and 15 French managed to repel a British squadron of 200 men trying to capture the post of Port La Joie (now Adams, near Charlottetown).

In the Great Lakes, Aboriginal peoples appeared sympathetic to the French cause at first. In 1744, Governor Beauharnois wrote that the Odahwah, Huron and Miami from Detroit 'had taken up the hatchet presented to them

to attack the British at Belle Rivière over the winter.' A few raids were even launched on the Pennsylvania and Virginia borders in 1744. But the willingness to assist the French quickly turned to hostility. Following the capture of Louisbourg, the British were able to prevent French vessels from entering the St. Lawrence. Quebec City's supplies were thus cut off, resulting in a scarcity of ammunition and trade goods. Trade in the Great Lakes region was quickly brought to a standstill and the price of goods for Aboriginal traders skyrocketed. In addition, the French were no longer able to give their allies the annual gifts on which they were increasingly dependent. According to historian Richard White, Aboriginal peoples saw the sudden change as 'an example of French greed that violated the alliance.' The French were subsequently unable to garner the support of their allies, who preferred to remain neutral in the conflict. In 1747, French officer Charles des Champs de Boishébert complained of an 'agreement among the redskins these past years to stop destroying one another and let the pale-faces fight it out.' Some communities turned hostile to French presence in the region, killing any *coureurs de bois* they came across and seizing their goods.

In October 1748, the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle put an end to the War of the Austrian Succession, to the great relief of the French, who were able to recover the fortress of Louisbourg in exchange for the island of Madras, which had been captured from the British in 1746, and





to re-establish order in the Great Lakes. However, the massive and concerted opposition to French authority, though it had lasted just a few years, represented the first large-scale pan-Aboriginal movement in the Great Lakes region and it paved the way for Pontiac's uprising of 1763.

### Seven Years' War, 1756-1763

Unlike previous conflicts, the Seven Years' War broke out in North America and then spread to Europe. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which had put an end to the War of the Austrian Succession, simply restored the *status quo ante bellum* in America; the Anglo-French rivalry that had begun in the Ohio Valley remained alive and well. The French claimed ownership of the territory, saying they had discovered it in the 1680s. The British also claimed ownership, having acquired the rights in the Lancaster Treaty of 1744 from the Iroquois (who claimed they had conquered the region in the 1650s). To defend their interests, the French organized an expedition to Ohio in 1749, hoping to officially take possession of the territory, chase off the British traders and re-establish order among the Aboriginal 'rebels.' In 1753, a group of land speculators from Virginia created the Ohio Company and bought the rights to the Ohio Valley from King George II of England, hoping to place settlers on the land. That same year, the French built two forts in the region (Le Bœuf and Presqu'île) to maintain contact between Canada and Louisiana. Considering the move

an affront, the Virginians sent an armed contingent under the command of the young George Washington to drive out the French and secure their rights. The battle that broke out between the French and British troops marked the start of the hostilities known in the British colonies as the French and Indian War.

While Aboriginal peoples had been reluctant to defend the French in the previous war, they did not hesitate to lend their support this time. The main reason for the about-face was the negative Aboriginal perception of the British and their territorial policy. Speaking to Aboriginal peoples from the Great Lakes region in 1754, one mission Iroquois sought to persuade them of the fundamental difference between French and British colonial practices:

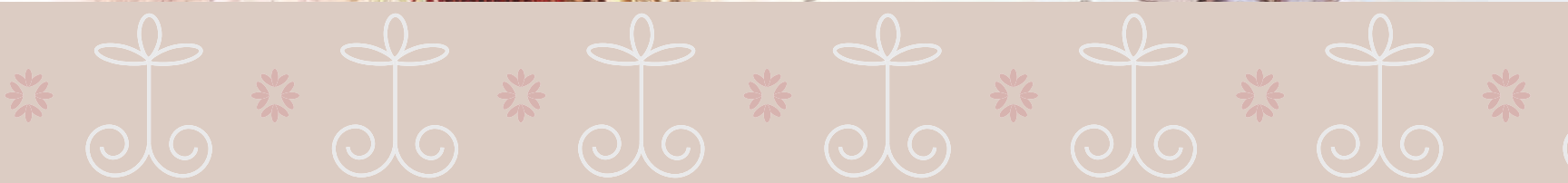
*Brothers, do you know the difference between our father and the English? Go and take a look at the forts our father has built and you will see that the land beneath their walls is still a hunting ground, for they have been placed in these places frequented by us only to make it easier for us to meet our needs, whereas as soon as the English take possession of the land, the game are forced to leave, because the trees are felled, the land is cleared and we can hardly find anything to give us shelter at night.*

#### Eastern Woodland Warriors at the time of the Seven Years' War

This modern reconstruction shows a Chief and warriors of the Eastern Woodland people as they may have appeared in the 1750s during the great struggle between France and Britain for control of North America. They are wearing a mixture of white and aboriginal clothing but their weapons are mainly European. One warrior has painted his face, a traditional activity before entering combat.

Painting by David Rickman [Department of National Defence]







Initially, Aboriginal support gave the French an advantage over the British. In 1754, a group of 100 Aboriginal men and 500 French captured a British fort in the Ohio Valley (Fort Necessity) defended by about 300 soldiers. The following year, an army of 1,500 British regulars and militiamen marched on Fort Duquesne on the Monongahela River, a tributary of the Ohio, to drive the French out. A counter force of 637 Aboriginals and 263 French laid an ambush and routed the British army killing or

wounding 977 men, while suffering light losses. Many look at this battle as the classic example of the superiority of Aboriginal guerrilla warfare over traditional European battle techniques in thick forest. Historian Peter MacLeod writes:

*As the allied centre stabilized, the British began to learn the limitations of grenadier tactics in a forest. Formed in line, standing upright, they had gained a fleeting ascendancy over the French, but now presented a conspicuous target to enemies who had 'always a large mark to shoot at and we having only to shoot at them behind trees or laid on their bellies.' The field guns were silenced by the Aboriginals who 'kept an incessant fire on the guns & killed ye men very fast.'*



In 1755, France decided to send 3,000 ground troop reinforcements to the colony under the command of General Jean-Armand Dieskau. The move initially had little impact on the Aboriginal peoples, who continued to play a vital role in the fighting. That same year, for instance, 600 Aboriginal men, 600 French-Canadian militiamen and 200 French regulars attacked a British camp entrenched at Lake George, in Mohawk territory. The following year, 250 Aboriginal warriors took part in the siege of Fort Oswego on the southern shores of Lake Ontario, along with 2,787 French soldiers

#### **Canadian militiaman**

Canadian militiaman wore short capots, leggings, breeches and moccasins when leaving on lengthy expeditions through the forest.

Reconstitution by Francis Back. [Parks Canada]

and militiamen led by General Montcalm, who had succeeded Dieskau.

However, while the Canadians (including Governor Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil) had always based their military tactics on extensive Aboriginal participation, the regular soldiers recently arrived from France showed indifference bordering on disgust for Aboriginal guerrilla tactics. The French officer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, for instance, wrote that Aboriginal warriors were a necessary evil, adding, ‘What a scourge! Humanity groans at having to make use of such monsters, but without them, we would be outnumbered.’ It was not long before Aboriginal peoples realized that they were held in contempt by the French officers. By 1757, 820 “mission Indian” and 979 Great Lakes Aboriginal people (from a total of 32 nations) accompanied 6,753 French soldiers (regulars and militiamen) to lay siege to Fort William Henry south of Lake George. On that occasion, the Marquis de Montcalm’s lack of regard for the opinions and tactics of his Aboriginal allies offended them greatly. They said: ‘My father, you have brought the art of war from the world beyond the great lake to this place; we know you are a grand master of this art, but we are more skilled in the science and cunning of scouting; we know more about these woods and how to make war in the woods. If you consult us, you will not be disappointed.’ European style siege warfare, with no hand-to-hand combat, left indigenous warriors disgruntled and standing on

the sidelines, unable to capture prisoners, take scalps or obtain booty. Their frustrations were not set aside when Montcalm offered the surrendering garrison the honour of marching away with their arms, baggage train and flags flying. The arcane formalities of European warfare made no sense to them whatsoever. Hundreds of warriors would stalk the column as it marched away, and accosted the panicked soldiers, and non-combatants in search of plunder and captives. This confused and dangerous scene included many killings, beatings and captures, but was subsequently blown massively out of proportion in the British colonies, with wild claims of a three hour slaughter of hundreds, perhaps more than a thousand men, women and children. Ian Steele in his recent analysis of the event estimated that between 67 and 184 British were killed. The chaotic scene marked the British psyche deeply: the ‘massacre’ became a symbol of Aboriginal savagery and perfidy and, by extension, their French allies. However, when it comes to massacres, there was little to choose between the French and the British during this period. For instance, in 1759, a group of British rangers led by Robert Rogers razed the Abenaki village of Bécancour, because its inhabitants had refused an offer of neutrality from British diplomats. During the raid, the rangers burned down the entire village, killing about 30 people and capturing five. At least two of the captives were eaten by the rangers, who were short of provisions.





By 1758, relations between the French and Aboriginal peoples had deteriorated even further. Montcalm was at Fort Carillon on Lake Champlain and had just held out against a siege by an army of nearly 15,000 British soldiers. When the warriors from Sault St. Louis arrived, the battle was already over. Montcalm was particularly ungracious in his greeting, stating, 'Now that you're here, I no longer need you. Did you come only to see bodies? Go out behind the fort and you'll see some.' The general even refused to allow the warriors to go reconnoitring in the enemy camp, telling them, 'You can go to the devil if you're not happy about it.' Offended, the warriors returned to Montreal and complained to Governor Vaudreuil, who reacted by issuing a severe reprimand to Montcalm, reminding him of the crucial role indigenous allies had always played in the military affairs of New France. Montcalm and Vaudreuil's respective attitudes are symptomatic of the gulf that had opened between French and Canadian societies.

By 1759, the tide had begun to turn against France. The year before, the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, had decided to invest huge sums in the colonial war. He managed to raise an army of 23,000 men, 13,000 of whom were sent to attack Louisbourg under the command of James Wolfe in 1758. About 200 Mi'kmaq stood alongside about 2,500 French in the assault, but after nearly 22 days of siege, the town was forced to surrender. The following year, a squadron of 11,000 British soldiers was

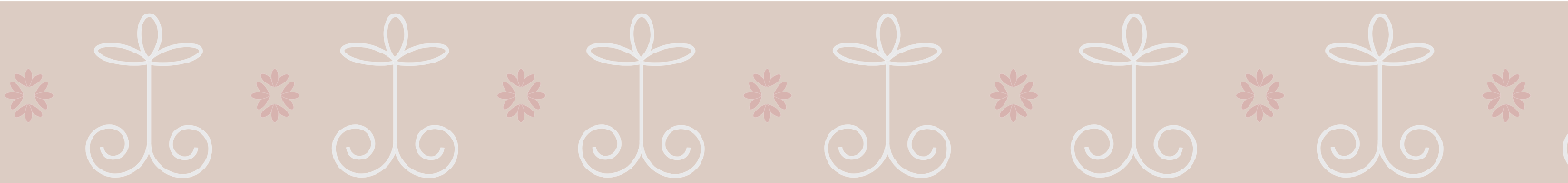
dispatched against Quebec City. In 1755, London had decided to centralize management of American Indian affairs and take charge of the matter. Two departments were created, one for the northern colonies and one for the southern colonies. Sir William Johnson, a man who had influence with the Iroquois Five Nations, was made superintendent for the north. The new policy was highly effective and by 1759 Johnson had convinced the Iroquois to take up the hatchet against the French and participate in an attack on Fort Niagara, one of the strategic points in New France's defence network.

Despite the increasingly arrogant attitude of certain French administrators, many indigenous nations remained allied with them until the surrender of Quebec City in the fall of 1759. At the battle of the Plains of Abraham, Aboriginal marksmen lay in wait in the bushes with Canadian militiamen along the northern flank of the battlefield. According to historian Peter MacLeod, 'Some of the first shots of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham were fired by Amerindians.' They also assisted the Canadian militiamen in covering the retreat of the French troops. As one French soldier reported in the aftermath of the battle, the British who pursued the retreating troops 'encountered Indians and irregulars lying in wait in the woods.' But their impact on the battle was minimal, things had changed in North America: the decisive action was the clash of regular British and French armies on the Plains.

**Bust of a Mohawk Indian by Sempronius Stretton, 1804**

This man is depicted wearing the red, black and yellow face paint favoured by warriors about to enter combat. The helmet style headgear was a favourite of the Iroquois peoples and the warrior has adorned himself with jewellery and ornamentation that derives from both aboriginal and white sources. Note the crucifix.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-14827)*





#### Aboriginal Council, 1764

Following the victory in the Seven Years' War, British authorities disregarded Johnson's advice to continue the practice of giving annual gifts to the Crown's aboriginal allies. The result was unrest that culminated in the Pontiac Rebellion of 1763. This illustration depicts one of the councils between aboriginal leaders and British officers which ended the rebellion and restored good relations with the Crown's important allies.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-000299)*

### The end of the Franco-Aboriginal alliances

In order to weaken the French, the British tried to break the Franco-Aboriginal alliance and neutralize their warriors. As early as 1755, William Johnson was sending messages to the Aboriginal peoples in the St. Lawrence Valley through the Iroquois League, encouraging them to let the British and French fight it out between them. The Aboriginal leaders politely refused Johnson's invitation, however, saying they and the French were of the 'same blood' and they preferred to die with them.

Johnson made other overtures during the war to convince the mission communities to remain neutral, but it was not until 1760 that the allies finally agreed to lay down their weapons. At the time, over 18,000 British soldiers were converging on Montreal, the last bastion of the French in Canada. One force, under the command of William Haviland, was approaching via the Richelieu River; a second contingent, under the command of James Murray, had left Quebec City and was travelling up the St. Lawrence; lastly, General Jeffrey Amherst and William Johnson were leading a third army that had left Lake Ontario and was travelling downstream by boat. Faced with such an overwhelming opponent, the Aboriginal nations had no choice but to negotiate peace. On August 30, at Oswegatchie (or La Présentation, a village of mission Iroquois established by the Jesuits in



1749 on the site of the current town of Ogdensburg, New York), William Johnson met with representatives of the Seven Nations of Canada, which included all the “mission Indians” in the St. Lawrence Valley, and entered into a treaty with them:

*Some of these Indians joined us, rapporte [sic] Johnson, and went upon parties for prisoners etc., whilst the rest preserved so strict a neutrality that we passed all the dangerous rapids, and the whole way without the least opposition, and by that means came so near to the other two armies, that the enemy could attempt nothing further without an imminent risk of the city and habitants.*

On September 8, 1760, to avoid fighting a hopeless battle, Governor Vaudreuil signed the surrender of Montreal. A week later, the Seven Nations of Canada met with William Johnson once again in Sault St. Louis, where they confirmed the Treaty of Oswegatchie. Basically,

Johnson promised the Native peoples that they could keep ‘the peaceable possession of the spot of ground’ on which they were living, continue to practise their religion and maintain their customs, and benefit from ‘a free trade open.’ In return, Aboriginal groups agreed to ‘bury the French hatchet we made use of, in the bottomless Pitt, never to be seen more by us or our Posterity.’

For their part, the Abenaki and Mi’kmaq found themselves isolated after the deportation of the Acadians in 1755 and the fall of Louisbourg in 1758. Without their French allies, the two nations had no choice but to make peace with the British, and did so in June 1761. The destruction of the Abenaki village of Bécancour by Robert Rogers’ rangers two years earlier may have caused the maritime Algonquians to consider the fate awaiting them if they continued to resist British authority. Whatever the case, when the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Seven Years’ War in 1763, peace was already well established between them and the British in eastern Canada.







## Chapter Three

# *In Defence of their Homelands*

The fall of New France and the end of French power in the interior of the continent altered the geo-strategic situation for Aboriginal peoples in the north-eastern portions of North America. Unfortunately for Britain and for its Aboriginal allies, victory in the Seven Years' War failed to create prolonged peace in North America. Instead, Aboriginal communities were forced into a series of wars over the next 55 years, first against the British and later the new American Republic, for their freedom, their lands and their survival.

## **Shifting Relationships**

In 1760-61, with the French threat gone, British officials no longer felt obliged to accommodate Aboriginal wishes. This was particularly evident among the western nations of the Great Lakes and the Ohio valley that had traditionally allied with France. British settlers from the Thirteen Colonies, whose penetration of Aboriginal lands in this area had previously been restricted by fear of French and Indian attack, now flooded in unchecked. They began to carve out farmsteads, in some cases without first consulting the Miami, or Ottawa, or Wyandot on whose land they settled. In other cases, shady and competing land purchase deals were obtained by British land speculators.

This drastic transformation in Aboriginal relations with the Europeans fostered a burning resentment amongst Native peoples across the frontier. As one of the western chiefs explained to his British counterpart:

*... although you have conquered the French, you have not yet conquered us! We are not your slaves. These lakes, these woods, and mountains, were left to us by our ancestors. They are our inheritance; and we will part with them to none. Your nation supposes that we, like the white people, cannot live without bread – and pork – and beef! But you ought to know, that He, the Great Spirit and Master of Life, had provided food for use, in these spacious lakes, and on these woody mountains.*

### **Chief of the Ottawa nation, War of 1812**

Depicted as he may have appeared at a formal council with British officers of the Indian Department during the war, this chief wears finely embroidered clothing and is adorned with a mixture of aboriginal and white jewelry.

*Painting by Ron Volstad [Department of National Defence]*



Sir William Johnson, the superintendent of the Indian Department, the Crown agency created in 1755 to manage Aboriginal affairs in British North America, was aware of this resentment. He warned the British commander-

in-chief, Major-General Sir Jeffrey Amherst, that the situation was serious, but Amherst was determined to reduce expenditure in North America by stopping the traditional practice of giving gifts. He viewed this practice





#### Costume of Domiciliated Indians, c. 1807

Depicted in a temporary hunting and fishing camp, this 1807 drawing by George Heriot shows aboriginal peoples of the early 19th century wearing and using a mixture of traditional and European clothing, tools and weapons. By the time of the War of 1812 many of the aboriginal groups in eastern Canada had chosen to live in fixed locations.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-012781)*

as mercenary; furthermore it was not his intention ‘to gain the friendship of Indians by presents.’ Instead, he calculated that a scarcity of supplies and ammunition among the western nations, combined with a firm British hand, would keep them quiet.

#### The Pontiac Rebellion of 1763

By the spring of 1763, widespread rumours and reports suggested that the Aboriginal peoples were planning an offensive against the British frontier. These rumours were true. The so-called Pontiac Rebellion of 1763 was another in a series of struggles by desperate Aboriginal







peoples to preserve their territory, independence and culture against the pressure of European intrusion. In May, an alliance of western nations came together under the Ottawa chief, Pontiac. Pontiac's primary target was the principle British fort in the region at Detroit. Alerted to his danger, the British commander managed to foil Pontiac's efforts to take the fort by subterfuge. Pontiac was left with little choice but to lay siege. This was the signal for the warriors of all the allied Aboriginal people across the Great Lakes-Ohio region to strike, and the results stunned the British. Unexpectedly, Aboriginal warriors attacked and overwhelmed almost every British fort in the area: Fort Sandusky fell to the Ottawa; Fort St. Joseph to the Potawatomi; Fort Miami to the Miami; Fort Ouiatenon to the Miami, Kickapoo and Illinois; Fort Michilimakinaw to the Ojibwa; Fort Edward Augustus to the Ottawa, Wyandot and Ojibwa; and Forts Venango, La Boeuf and Presque'Isle to the Seneca and others. In addition, warriors lashed out at the settlers in their midst, killing up to two thousand in raids on farms and villages in the Ohio valley that deadly summer.

Despite successes elsewhere, Pontiac's failure to seize Detroit gradually undermined his prestige and the power and cohesion of his alliances dissipated. Sir William Johnson, a resident of northern New York and connected by marriage with the leadership of the Iroquois League of Six Nations (the Tuscarora people having joined the League in the 1720s), was able to conclude peace and

restore the traditional distribution of presents. More importantly, shocked by the death and expense of war with the still potent Aboriginal people of the continental interior, the British crafted the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This important document established the colony of Quebec and sought to establish regulations and rules of conduct for dealings with the Indians in the fur trade and in land deals. Moreover, it set a boundary between the British colonies and a designated Indian Territory into which White settlers were forbidden to trespass. This and a subsequent treaty, signed at Fort Stanwix in 1768, established a line from Oneida Lake, in northern New York, southward to the Pennsylvania border and then southwest, to and along the Ohio River, as the boundary between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples. These measures were intended to protect the nations of the Great Lakes and provide for a peaceful and gradual expansion of the frontier.

American colonists, covetous of the rich lands of the interior, did not view this new territory in the same light. They saw it as an arbitrary attempt by Great Britain to limit their westward expansion. Effectively, Britain found itself fulfilling the role previously occupied by France as the barrier to American colonial expansion. As it turned out, the settlement pressures to move across the border into the Indian Territory were too great, and the British government's ability to control the frontier was too limited. In the decade that followed the Pontiac

#### **Sir William Johnson (1715-1774)**

The first Superintendent of the British Indian Department, Johnson was instrumental in securing an alliance between the British crown and the Iroquois League of Six Nations that stood British interests in good stead during the Seven Years and American Revolutionary Wars.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-005197)*



**Thayendanegea or Joseph Brant (1742-1807)**

A war chief of the Mohawk nation, Thayendanegea led aboriginal forces in northern New York during the Revolutionary War. Following the British defeat he brought his people to Canada to settle along the banks of the Grand River and was prominent in aboriginal diplomacy in North America until his death.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-011092)*

Rebellion, settlement continued to expand into what the Americans considered the Northwest, despite the Royal Proclamation. British efforts to control the frontier were the first of many measures, including increased taxation, which provoked widespread resentment and ultimately resulted in American civil unrest.

**American Revolutionary War, 1775-1783**

The Thirteen Colonies moved toward an outright breach with the British in the 1770s. Initially, both sides hoped and intended that the Aboriginal people should remain neutral. Soon both were competing to recruit Aboriginal allies. Throughout the American Revolutionary War, Aboriginal military power in the Great Lakes area became a major consideration for British military leaders in the northern theatre. The major diplomatic efforts were directed at the League of Six Nations Iroquois, which had largely remained neutral in European conflicts since 1701. Although the League attempted to maintain its neutral stance, it was dragged into the conflict and torn asunder in its own civil war. Warriors from both the Iroquois League and the Seven Nations of Canada were instrumental in holding up a rebel offensive against a weakly defended Canada in the autumn of 1775. The delay forced the Americans to prolong their campaign over the winter and ultimately to face defeat at the gates of Quebec City. In the summer of 1777, a force of British regulars, Loyalists and warriors won a notable success at the battle of Oriskany, but Aboriginal allies

were less decisive in assisting the doomed offensive led by Major-General John Burgoyne up the Champlain Valley that autumn. Burgoyne's defeat and surrender at Saratoga brought France into the war on the side of the rebellious colonies and the conflict broadened into a general European war.

For the next five years, Britain's Aboriginal allies in the north, led by the Mohawk chief Thayandenaga, or Joseph Brant, participated in a series of campaigns and raids against the border settlements of New York and Pennsylvania. Little quarter was given on either side. Although the main focus of the larger conflict shifted to the south in 1780, Britain's Aboriginal allies won two of their most notable successes – Sandusky and Blue Licks – after the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781. Aboriginal peoples also suffered fearsome losses. The homelands of the Iroquois League were devastated by an American punitive campaign in 1779, and perhaps the worst depredation on either side was the massacre by American troops of more than a hundred Christian Delaware men, women and children at the Gnadehuten Mission in the Ohio country in 1782.

Undeclared on the field of battle, Brant and his warriors were appalled to learn of the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the war and established a new international border between Britain's North American possessions and her former colonies. Negotiated in

Europe by European and American statesmen, this treaty did not include a single reference to the Aboriginal nations who had participated in the conflict, although it ceded the lands of those who had been allied with Britain to the new American republic. As an officer of the Indian Department reported to London, the Indians rightfully felt betrayed by the terms of the treaty:

*... [They] look upon our conduct to them as treacherous and cruel: they told me they never could believe that our King could pretend to cede to America what was not his own to give ... they would defend their own Just Rights or perish in the attempt to the last man, they were but a handful of small People but they would die like men, which they thought preferable to misery and distress if deprived of their Hunting Grounds.*

This resentment was so strong that for a considerable period after 1783 British authorities feared that their former allies would attack them. Fortunately for the war weary British, this did not happen. The British offered land in Canada and financial compensation to the Iroquois Loyalists, as they did to non-native Loyalists. Brant, the Mohawk war chief, and Tekarihogen, the peace chief, led 1,800 Mohawks, Cayuga and other Six Nations people to a large tract of land on the Grand River north of Lake Erie, while John Deserontyon





established a smaller and separate Mohawk community at Tyendinaga on Lake Ontario's Bay of Quinte. John Graves Simcoe, the governor of the new colony of Upper Canada (created in 1791), hoped that these new Aboriginal settlements would provide an active barrier against possible American aggression from the south.

### Trouble in the Northwest, 1783-1794

Some of the Aboriginal peoples who had been allied with Britain elected to remain in the new American republic, a choice many came to regret. As soon as the restraints stipulated in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768 were removed, the attitude of the American government was that those nations who had fought for Britain during the war were conquered peoples and their territory was forfeit. American officials imposed severe treaties on the Iroquois still resident in the United States, forcing them off their traditional land onto reservations. Ironically, those who suffered worst were the Oneida and Tuscaroras who had supported the revolutionaries during the war. The Americans had less luck with the Algonkian and Iroquoian-speaking peoples further west in the Ohio valley. More numerous, more united in the defence of their territory, and further from the centres of White population, these Aboriginal communities refused to accept any change in the boundary of the Ohio River, that had been established in the 1760s. The victorious, but nearly bankrupt, American government

viewed this region as its birthright, its inheritance, and needed the revenues from the sale of these lands to pay its substantial war debts. The stage was set for further conflict.

The nations of the Northwest (the modern states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio) formed a new confederacy in 1786, which they called 'The United Indian Nations,' to defend their land. The infant American government, caught between a flood of settlers who wanted to move into the Ohio area and the intractability of Aboriginal peoples who wished to preserve that river as their boundary, was forced into military action after the Native Confederacy attacked illegal settlements on their side of the river. In September 1790, Brigadier-General Josiah Harmar was ordered 'to extirpate, if possible,' the attackers. He set out from Fort Washington (modern Cincinnati) with 1,400 regulars and militia to invade the Miami nation. Within three weeks, having suffered more than 200 casualties, he was back at his base, with nothing accomplished but the burning of a few abandoned villages.

American hopes for a quick victory were shattered. One congressman brooded 'a horid [sic] Savage war Stairs [sic] us in the face.' Instead of being humbled by the Harmar expedition, the Confederacy 'appear determined [sic] on a general War.' In the early summer of 1791, Major-General Arthur St. Clair assembled a larger force,

### Officer, Indian Department. 1812

During the War of 1812, the aboriginal people of the Great Lakes area played an important role in defending Canada against American invasion. Warriors in the field were often accompanied by officers of the British Indian Department who spoke their language and knew their customs, and who served as liaison between aboriginal leaders and British military commanders. This Indian Department officer is dressed practically for the field and wears a felt slouch hat, and old and patched uniform coatee, and laced rather than high riding boots. He would have little use for his sword in action but retains it as a symbol of his rank.

*Painting by Ron Volstad [Department of National Defence]*

consisting of 1500 regulars and 800 militia. His advance was delayed while he trained an army consisting of recruits who one of his staff characterized as ‘the offscourings of large Towns and Cities; – enervated by Idleness, Debaucheries and every species of Vice.’ St. Clair began to creep forward in September, accompanied by a lengthy procession of camp followers. Shortly after sunrise on 4 November 1791, 2,000 warriors led by the Confederacy’s war chiefs, the Shawnee, Blue Jacket and the Miami under their warrior chief Michikinikwa (Little Turtle), attacked St. Clair’s camp on the banks of the Wabash River. Although, St. Clair, old, sick and feeble, had neglected to post proper pickets around the badly sited camp, the initial attacks were twice repulsed. At this point, one witness recorded, the Ohio warriors, ‘irritated beyond measure,’ simply pulled back to reorganise:

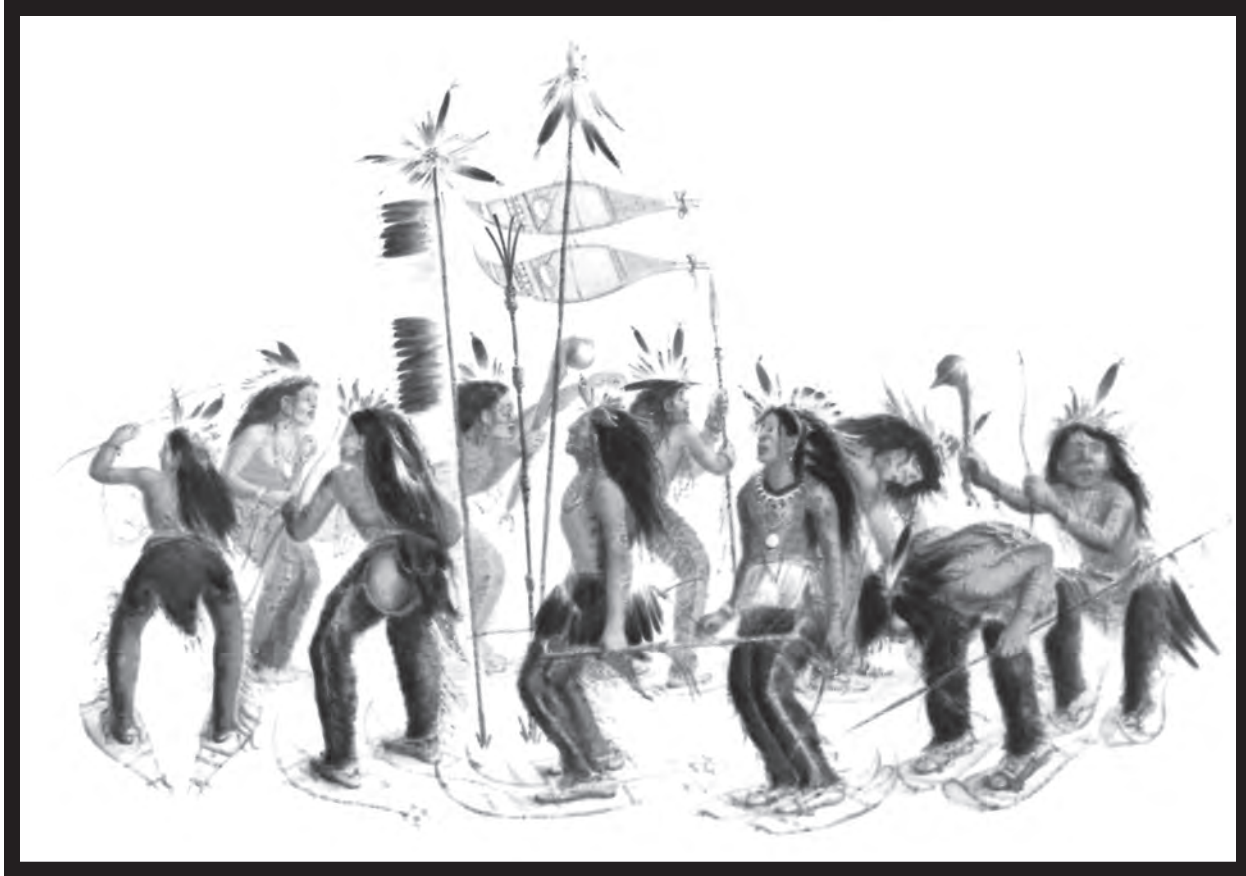
*... a little distance, where separating into their different tribes and each conducted by their own Leaders, they returned like Furies to the assault & almost instantly got possession of near half the Camp – they found it in a row of Flour Bags, & bags of Stores, which serv’d them as a Breast work, from behind which kept up a constant & heavy fire, the Americans charg’d them several times with Fixed Bayonets, but were as often repuls’d – at length General Butler, second in Command, being kill’d, the Americans fell into confusion & were driven from their Cannon, round which a Hundred of their bravest Men fell, the Rout now became universal, & in the utmost disorder, the Indians follow’d for Six Miles & many fell Victims to their Fury.*

When it was over, 647 American soldiers were dead, 229 wounded and all St. Clair’s camp stores and 21 pieces of artillery lost. Aboriginal casualties were estimated at 50 warriors killed and wounded. The Battle of the Wabash was the single greatest victory by Aboriginal peoples against the armed forces of the United States.

Following that triumph, the Northwest Confederacy ravaged the White settlements on their side of the 1768 boundary for nearly two years, but refrained from attacking American territory. Throughout its struggle, the Confederacy received advice from the British Indian Department officers at Detroit, but their requests for active military support were denied, even though Britain had retained its posts south of the border. Britain offered to mediate in the contest and suggested the establishment of an independent and neutral Aboriginal state between the Mississippi, the Ohio and the Great Lakes. Not surprisingly, the American government firmly rejected this proposal, which it regarded as unwanted meddling. For nearly three years, Britain, the United States, the Confederacy, and the Six Nations of Canada under Joseph Brant tried to end the controversy over the boundary through a series of conferences, but the Aboriginal peoples of the Northwest remained adamant that the Ohio River continue to be the dividing line.

The Confederacy’s desires for independence were shattered in 1794 when a new and well-trained American army under Major-General Anthony Wayne advanced into their territory and defeated a series of Aboriginal attacks, culminating in the major American victory at the battle of Fallen Timbers in August. When British





**The Snow-shoe Dance, 1844**

*Library and Archives Canada (C-006271)*

military commanders refused military aid to retreating Aboriginal warriors, the Confederacy began to disintegrate. Tensions between Britain and the United States, which had come close to the point of troubles in the Northwest and maritime matters on the high seas, were ameliorated with the signing of Jay's Treaty in 1794. The British turned over the posts they had retained on American territory in return for guarantees that British subjects and Aboriginal peoples could pass freely

over the border. For the Aboriginal Confederacy, the result was despair: the British had abandoned them for a second time. Some fled to Canada, but most signed a general peace treaty with Wayne in 1795 that ceded the Ohio valley to the American government. Their 12-year stand against the United States had failed, but it provided ample time for the infant province of Upper Canada to take root and prosper.



### Tecumseh (1768-1813)

The Shawnee Chief Tecumseh dreamed of forming a confederacy of all the aboriginal nations from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. He brought his followers to the British side in the War of 1812, but military reverses led to his death in battle in 1813. There is no known picture of Tecumseh but most specialists agree that this sketch, drawn from an eyewitness description of the man, is the closest likeness.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-000319)*

## Tecumseh, His Confederacy and the Road to War

For nearly a decade after the battle of Fallen Timbers, there was relative peace in the Northwest. White settlers flooded into the area and the new American territories of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio were established. By 1810, some 200 000 Americans lived in Ohio alone. The Northwest nations had not forgotten their humiliation, however. They began to pay greater attention to an impressive young Shawnee named Tecumseh, who urged the creation of a single native confederacy stretching from the Canadian border to Spanish territory in Mexico that would be strong enough to resist the encroachment of the 'Big Knives,' as he termed the Americans. Tecumseh travelled ceaselessly, spreading his message to the Aboriginal peoples from the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Mississippi river. But while Tecumseh gave his listeners hope for the future he also advised them not to engage in warfare with the Americans until the time was right.

Not surprisingly the popularity of the charismatic Tecumseh worried American frontier officials. Governor William Henry Harrison of the Indiana Territory met with Tecumseh twice in vain attempts to reduce the increasing tension between the Aboriginal peoples and White settlers, and he was both impressed and concerned:

*The implicit obedience and respect which the followers of Tecumseh pay to him, is really astonishing, and more than any other circumstance bespeaks him one of those uncommon geniuses which spring up occasionally to produce revolutions, and overturn the established order of things. If it were not for the vicinity of the United States, he would, perhaps, be the*

*founder of an empire that would rival in glory Mexico or Peru. No difficulties deter him. For four years he has been in constant motion. You see him to-day on the Wabash, and in a short time hear of him on the shores of Lake Erie or Michigan, or on the banks of the Mississippi; and wherever he goes he makes an impression favorable to his purposes. He is now upon the last round to put a finishing stroke to his work.*

In the autumn of 1811, Harrison decided to make a preemptive strike against this latest Confederacy. In early November, while Tecumseh was absent on a journey to

the south, he moved a force of regulars and militia near the village of Tippecanoe (near modern Lafayette, Indiana) established by Tecumseh's brother, Tenskwatawa or the Prophet. The Prophet was unable to restrain his warriors and sniping between sentries escalated into a pitched battle that was won by the Americans. Many of the defeated fled to the safety of Canada. When Tecumseh returned to the area early in 1812, he set out to rebuild his Confederacy and to placate American authorities. At the same time, he sought the assistance of British officers of the Indian Department who listened to him partly because they were convinced that war between Britain and the United States was at hand.

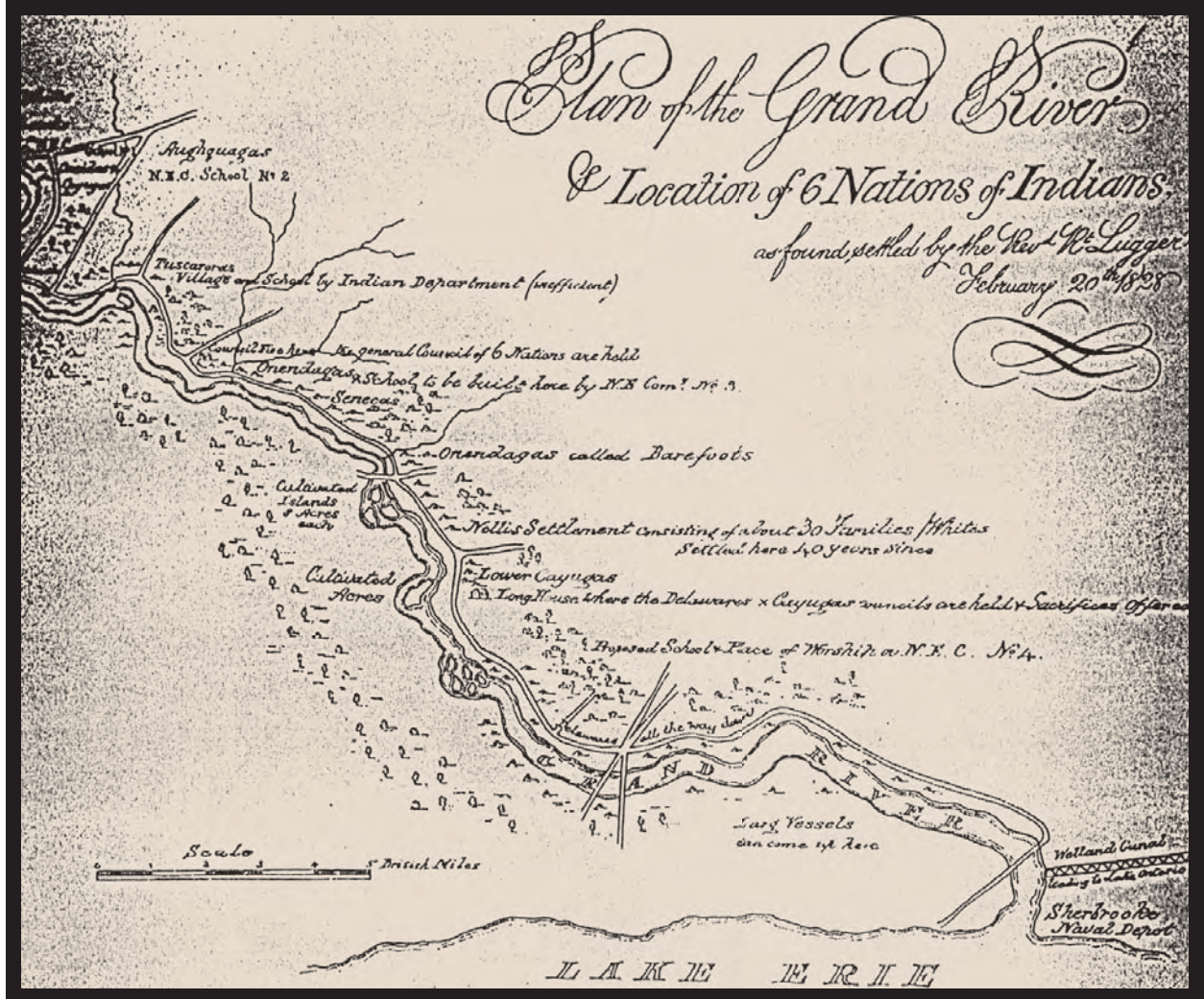


#### Which is Tecumseh?

Pictured above are two varying depictions of Tecumseh. The sketch at left depicts Tecumseh in traditional dress and was drawn in 1808. The 1848 painting at right by Benson Lossing was based on the former sketch but this version depicts Tecumseh in the uniform of a British general as was the popular (but untrue) belief of the time. Also note that Tecumseh is pictured sporting a "nose ring" which was usually not depicted in drawings of aboriginal peoples of this period.

*In Defence of their Homelands*





Plan of the Grand River and Location of Six Nations of Indians, as found settled by the Reverend RT Luger, February, 26th, 1828.

As it was designed to do from the time of its founding in 1784, the original Grand River tract provided a military corridor which effectively checked potential invasion from either the Detroit-Windsor frontier to the west, or from the Niagara frontier to the east. As with neighbouring Anishinabeg groups, Grand River fighters were successfully mobilized in the Crown interest in the War of 1812 and again during the Rebellions of 1837-1838. Their proximity in relation to government and population centres, military garrisons, transportation and communication routes, and frontiers with the U.S., and their economic adaptations arising from these situations, influenced the manner in which First Nations might subsequently support the Crown militarily during war and conflicts other than war.

Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library (971.3-C4)

Although Tecumseh still counselled peace, he also believed that war was imminent and promised his Confederacy would ally itself with Britain in the forthcoming contest. He expressed to the Indian Department officers that ‘if their father the King should be in earnest and appear in sufficient force, they would hold fast by him.’ Tecumseh also stated that his followers were determined to defend their land and, although they did not expect Britain to engage in military operations, they did expect logistical support – ‘you will push forward towards us what may be necessary to supply our wants.’ For their part, the Indian Department cautioned the Confederacy not to attack until war was declared. As one officer put it, ‘Keep your eyes fixed on me; my tomahawk is now up; be you ready, but do not strike until I give the signal.’ Tecumseh agreed with this advice, but warned the British that:

*If we hear of the Big Knives coming towards our villages to speak peace, we will receive them, but if We hear of any of our people being hurt by them, or if they unprovokedly advance against us in a hostile manner, be assured we will defend ourselves like men. And if we hear of any of our people having been killed, We will immediately send to all the Nations on or towards the Mississippi, and all this Island will rise as one man.*

Throughout this period, the Indian Department had continued to provide annual gifts, including weapons and shot, to Aboriginal peoples in the United States and shelter for refugees from the struggles below the border. Such activities were regarded with great suspicion by American officials. Although some Aboriginal warriors residing in Canadian territory had participated in the fighting in the Ohio valley, their leaders in Canada encouraged the peaceful resolution of the differences between the Northwest nations and the Americans. The Seven Nations of Canada and the Iroquoian peoples in Upper Canada had seen enough conflict in the previous century and preferred to stay out of Anglo-American quarrels.

This desire to remain neutral became difficult, however, as Britain and the United States drifted toward war in the first decade of the 19th Century. The origins of the tensions between the two were, as usual, to be found in Europe. In 1793, revolutionary France had declared war on Britain, initiating a struggle that would ensue, with a brief intermission, for 23 years. Both countries had adopted restrictive maritime policies, forbidding the ships of neutral nations that traded with one belligerent from trading with the other. These measures severely curtailed the profits of American merchants. Since the British were supreme at sea, particularly after Nelson’s great naval victory at Trafalgar in 1805, American resentment was exacerbated by the Royal Navy’s penchant for

stopping American vessels on the high seas and forcibly impressing their sailors, some who were British deserters, into British service. Many also suspected that Britain was promoting trouble in the Northwest by actively supporting the nations of Tecumseh's Confederacy. Britain, pre-occupied with the war in Europe, seemed oblivious to American concerns. A few weeks after the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, President James Madison of the United States, convinced that war was the only way that his country could resolve its grievances, decided to put the republic 'in armour' and prepare for hostilities against Britain. Given the overwhelming strength of the Royal Navy, the United States had only one practical military option: an attack on Canada.

### **The Coming of War in 1812**

Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, governor-general and commander-in-chief of the British colonies in North America, knew that because of British military commitments in Europe he could not expect massive troop reinforcements. Prevost had about 5,600 regular soldiers in Upper and Lower Canada, backed up by some 60,000 militia in the lower province and 11,000 in the upper. Faced by an enemy population estimated to be more than seven million, his plan was to abandon Upper Canada, which was surrounded on three sides by American territory, and pull back to Montreal and, if necessary, Quebec, until he could be reinforced from Britain. This cautious defensive strategy was opposed by

Major-General Isaac Brock, Prevost's subordinate commander in Upper Canada. Brock argued that the upper province could be successfully defended if the Aboriginal nations in the Northwest were encouraged to attack the frontier settlements in that area, disrupting possible American invasion plans. Brock recognized, however, that before the British could 'expect an active cooperation on the part of the Indians, the reduction of Detroit and Michilimackinac must convince that people, who conceive themselves to have been sacrificed in 1794, to our policy, that we are earnestly engaged in war.'

In the six months preceding the American declaration of war in June 1812, Indian Department officers were secretly active among Native peoples on both Canadian and American territory, where they estimated they might be able to call on the support of as many as 10,000 warriors. The largest proportion, 8,410 according to the Department, would come from the western nations whose own conflict with the Americans made them 'amicable to the Cause.' There were far fewer warriors available on Canadian territory. The Seven Nations of Canada were estimated to be only 1,040 strong, while in Upper Canada the Iroquois people on the Grand River and at Tyendinaga, and the Mississaugas and Ojibwa peoples, could only contribute 550 men. While the western nations were mostly prepared to ally themselves with the British, the Aboriginal peoples in Canada proved more equivocal.

#### **Mohawk Warrior from Tyendinaga, Autumn 1813**

The warriors from the small Mohawk community at Tyendinaga near Kingston, although few in numbers, participated in much fighting during the War of 1812, seeing action at Sacketts Harbor and in the Niagara peninsula in 1813. Their most prominent service was rendered at the battle for Chrysler's Farm in November, 1813 where they played a role disproportional of their numbers. This warrior is depicted as he may have appeared at Chrysler's Farm.

*Painting by Ron Volstad [Department of National Defence]*







**Teyoninhokarawen or John Norton, the Mohawk War Chief (1760-1830)**

The product of a Cherokee father and Scots mother, Norton was adopted by the Grand River Mohawks and rose to become a war chief of that nation. Between 1812 and 1815 he proved to be, after Tecumseh, one of the most loyal and effective aboriginal military leaders in Canada. Educated in white schools, he not only translated the Gospels into Mohawk but also wrote one of the most complete and literate personal memoirs of the War of 1812 from either side. Note the turban, another popular form of headgear among the Iroquois peoples.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-123832)*

This uncertain response was particularly evident in the Grand River nations, the strongest Aboriginal force in the Canadas, who adopted a neutral stance toward the forthcoming conflict at the urging of their fellow Iroquois who lived in American territory. The Six Nations had longstanding grievances against officials of the British Indian Department, whom they suspected were profiting from the sale of their lands to the whites. Even Brock's promise to investigate these grievances and, if appropriate, adjust them in their favour failed to change their stance. More persuasive to the Six Nations was the argument made by a delegation of Cayuga and Onondaga chiefs from the United States who visited the Grand River in June 1812 to advise caution:

*We have come from our homes to warn you, that you may preserve yourselves and families from distress. We discover that the British and Americans are on the Eve of a War, – they are in dispute respecting some rights on the Sea, with which we are unacquainted; – should it end in a Contest, let us keep aloof: – Why should we again fight, and call upon ourselves the resentment of the Conquerors? We know that neither of these powers have any regard for us ... except when they want us. Why then should we endanger the comfort, even the existence of our families, to enjoy their smiles only for the Day in which they need us?*



The majority of the Six Nations living along the Grand felt that this was sound reasoning for keeping out of the white man's quarrels, despite the exhortations of a smaller pro-British faction led by John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen, or the Snipe. The son of a Cherokee father and a Scottish mother, Norton had become a respected leader amongst the Six Nations, and by 1812 was a prominent war chief. The Grand River nations were going to remain neutral and Norton was forced to report to Brock that the community was divided, but that, if threatened by American invasion, 'I have no doubts they are not so depraved as to be faithless.'

### 1812: A Year of Victories

On 18 June 1812 the United States declared war on Great Britain. American leaders were confident: 'the acquisition of Canada this year will be a mere matter of marching' boasted former President Thomas Jefferson. Reality proved different. In 1812, the outnumbered British, Canadian and Aboriginal fighters won a series of critical battles that stopped the Americans in their tracks for that year and consolidated the Anglo-Aboriginal alliance in the Great Lakes-Ohio country.

Impelled by urgent requests from territorial governors in the Northwest concerned about preserving their frontier settlements against Tecumseh and his allies, the Americans planned their main thrust in the Detroit area. Thus, from the outset of the war, American strategic thinking was influenced by the need to reduce what was perceived

as a dangerous Aboriginal threat in the Northwest, and deflected from the more decisive objective – the vulnerable St. Lawrence waterway. When war broke out, Brigadier-General William Hull was stationed at Detroit with the better part of the American regular forces and substantial militia under his command. This policy did not change throughout the war and was, perhaps more than military prowess and victories, the major contribution of the Aboriginal peoples to the successful defence of Canada.

On 17 July, a small British force consisting of a few regulars, fur traders, and 130 Menominee, Winnebago and Sioux warriors surrounded the American fort on Mackinac Island which guarded the water passage to Lake Michigan and persuaded the American commander to surrender without a fight. Although Hull had crossed the Detroit River with the bulk of his command on 12 July, capturing the village of Sandwich, this early victory convinced the peoples of the Northwest that the British were serious and they began to threaten Hull's supply lines, forcing him to withdraw from Canada and take up a defensive position at Detroit on 8 August. By early August, contingents under Tecumseh's leadership actively prowled around the American position and attacked supply columns. Hull began to lose his nerve. The victory at Mackinac had given Brock one of the two objectives he regarded as necessary to secure the support of the Northwest peoples, and it was already paying dividends.



Brock's other objective was Detroit. In early August, he moved west to Amherstburg with a force of regulars and militia to join some 600 Northwest warriors. There, on 13 August, he met Tecumseh for the first time, and the two men liked and trusted each other from the outset. Brock wrote to Prevost that 'a more sagacious or a more gallant Warrior' than the Shawnee chief 'does not I believe exist.' Their combined force of British regulars, Canadian militia and Aboriginal warriors then advanced on Detroit where Hull, convinced he was surrounded by superior numbers of British regulars and warriors, became increasingly distraught. He was even less happy when he received a letter from Brock containing the grim hint that, since 'the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops, will be beyond control the moment the contest commences,' Hull should surrender in order 'to prevent the unnecessary effusion of blood.' The American commander at first refused, but after British artillery opened fire, he agreed to surrender his 2,000 well-entrenched men to Brock and the 1,300 British, militia and Aboriginal fighters under his command. Brock's bluff had paid off and the only field force in the American army marched into captivity. The victory at Detroit, coming on the heels of the success at Mackinac electrified both the European and Aboriginal peoples of Upper Canada and the Great Lakes-Ohio region, many of whom had assumed that the province would succumb to overwhelming enemy strength.

Though shaken by their early defeats, the Americans would not give up easily. In late September and early October, American troops began massing on the Niagara frontier. To meet this threat, Brock moved the greater part of his forces to Fort George, near Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake). He was joined there by Norton and a force of Grand River warriors who, buoyed by the victories in the west, had decided to take an active role in the defence of Canada. Norton was at Newark on the morning of 13 October when information came that the American forces had crossed the Niagara River and established themselves in the village of Queenston, seven miles south. He was ordered to assemble his warriors and move to the threatened spot, learning on the way that Brock had been killed leading a counterattack and that the invaders were in a strong position on the heights above Queenston. The Americans at Queenston outnumbered British forces and it would be some time before reinforcements of regular troops would arrive. Norton's men hesitated, but one of his warriors urged his 'Comrades and Brothers' to:

*... be Men; – remember the fame of ancient Warriors, whose Breasts were never daunted by odds of number; – We have found what we came for ... there they are, – it only remains to fight .... Look up, it is He above who shall decide our fate. Our gallant friends the Red Coats, will soon support us.*

The war party ascended the heights by a little known path, flanking the American position and proceeded to snipe and harass the Americans from behind with ‘coolness & Spirit’ until British reinforcements arrived.

At that point a general attack commenced against the invaders that pushed them back to the edge of the cliffs overlooking the Niagara gorge. John Norton recorded the final moments of the battle.

*We rushed forward, & saw the Grenadiers led by Lt. Bullock coming from the right along the Bank of the River; – the Enemy disappeared under the Bank; many plunging into the River. The inconsiderate still continued to fire at them [in the water], until checked by repeated commands of “Stop Fire.” The White Flag from the American General then met General Sheaffe [the British successor to Brock], proposing to Surrender at Discretion the remainder of those who had invaded us. The Prisoners amounted to about Nine Hundred.*

The Battle of Queenston Heights was an overwhelming victory, but the death of Brock, as Norton remembered, ‘threw a gloom over the sensations which this brilliant Success might have raised.’

## 1813: Triumphs and Disasters

The tide of British and Aboriginal victories continued into early 1813 on the western frontier. The loss of Detroit was a major setback for the United States and Madison’s government immediately began planning a counter-attack. William Henry Harrison, the popular and effective governor of the Indiana Territory, was given command of a force of 6,000 regulars and militia with orders to break the power of the Northwest nations and retake Detroit. One of his subordinates, Brigadier-General James Winchester, became impatient and pressed on to the British outpost of Frenchtown on the River Raisin, about forty kilometres southwest of Detroit. The new British commander on the western frontier, Brigadier-General Henry Procter, assembled a force of 550 regulars and militia and about 600 warriors from the Northwest nations and defeated Winchester on 22 January.

In the wake of the victory, Procter neglected to guard his prisoners and a party of Pottawatomis and Wyandot warriors killed about thirty wounded Americans. Warfare on the frontier between Native peoples and newcomers had long been characterised by viciousness and the calculated use of terror by both sides, and this war was no different. The Americans, particularly the frontier militia, neither gave nor expected quarter, determined as they were to annihilate the Aboriginal threat in the area.

Northwest peoples, who regarded the war as a struggle for survival, responded in kind. The cruel nature of the conflict was aptly summed up by Assiginack, or Black Bird, an Ottawa chief, in a speech addressed to the officers of the Indian Department who had admonished him for not restraining his warriors' excesses in battle.

*We have listened to your words, which words come from our father. We will now say a few words to you. At the foot of the Rapids last spring we fought the Big Knives, and we lost some of our people there. When we retired the Big Knives got some of our dead. They were not satisfied with having killed them, but cut them into small pieces. This made us very angry. My words to my people were: 'As long as the powder burnt, to kill and scalp,' but those behind us came up and did mischief. Last year at Chicago and St. Joseph's the Big Knives destroyed all our corn. This was fair, but, brother, they did not allow the dead to rest. They dug up their graves, and the bones of our ancestors were thrown away and we never could find them to return them to the ground.*

*I have listened with a good deal of attention to the wish of our father. If the Big Knives, after they kill people of our colour, leave them without hacking them to pieces, we will follow their example. They have themselves to blame.*

*The way they treat our killed, and the remains of those that are in their graves in the west, makes our people mad when they meet the Big Knives. Whenever they get any of our people into their hands they cut them like meat into small pieces.*

*We thought white people were Christians. They ought to show us a better example. We do not disturb their dead. What I say is known to all the people present. I do not tell a lie.*

Although there may have been isolated incidents of this type, John Norton felt it 'would be useless as well as endless to repeat the number of cruelties that had been asserted, & as bluntly contradicted, – without proofs to substantiate either on one Side or the other.' Regardless of proof, greatly exaggerated accounts of the Frenchtown massacre circulated in the United States, stoking the fires of vengeance.

Frenchtown was not the only victory the defenders of Upper Canada gained that winter. On the morning of 22 February, a combined British/Canadian force that included thirty Tyendinaga Mohawk warriors crossed the ice of the frozen St. Lawrence and took the American village of Ogdensburg after a short but sharp battle. Thereafter, the tide began to turn as the United States successfully mobilized its superior manpower to launch major offensives. At the end of April 1813, an American





**Voltigeurs on the march, 1813**

Canadian voltigeurs on the march in 1813. An aboriginal scout (left) accompanies the soldiers.

*Reconstitution by G.A. Embleton [Parks Canada]*

amphibious expedition attacked York, overwhelming the defenders who included forty Ojibway and Mississauga warriors. The Americans captured and burned the capital of Upper Canada.

A month later, the Americans made another successful landing at Fort George, at the mouth of the Niagara River, forcing the British and their Aboriginal allies in the Niagara peninsula to retreat west to where the modern city of Hamilton stands. A British victory

during the night action fought at Stoney Creek on 6 June, however, caused the invaders to withdraw to the fortified camp they had constructed near Fort George and it was not long before British regulars and Canadian militia, together with their Aboriginal allies, closed in around the American position.



Two Ottawa Chiefs who with others lately came down from Michillimackinac, Lake Huron to have a talk with their Great Father, the King or his representative.

Watercolour depicting a group of Aboriginal Chiefs, possibly at Bois Blanc Island near Amherstburg, Ontario. Circa 1813-20.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-14384)*



The American commander, Major-General Henry Dearborn, responded by mounting an expedition against De Cew's House. This post was known to be the forward supply depot for the aboriginal warriors harassing his positions and was garrisoned by about fifty British soldiers under the command of Lieutenant James FitzGibbon. Unbeknownst to the Americans, a contingent composed of 200 Grand River warriors, 180 Seven Nations warriors, and 70 Ojibway and Mississaugas from Upper Canada, led by Dominique Ducharme and John Brant, were encamped about two kilometres east of FitzGibbon's post, near an area of ponds and streams known as the Beaver Dams (close to what is now the modern city of St. Catharines).

On 23 June, a force of 600 American regular infantry and cavalry with three pieces of artillery, marched out of Fort George for De Cew's House under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Boerstler. Contact was made just after dawn the next day, when Ducharme and Brant sprung an ambush from the woods lining both sides of the road through the Beaver Dams. The allied warriors devastated the American advance guard of regular cavalry, and then advanced through the cover of the woods on the American main force that was deploying. Though American musketry and cannon inflicted casualties, the warriors sniping and 'their horrible yells terrified the enemy so much that they retired precipately' into a hollow where they were then surrounded. Two hours

later Lieutenant FitzGibbon carried a flag of truce. He informed Boerstler that the Americans were surrounded, not only by warriors from the Canadas but also those from the Northwest who were 'by no means as easily controlled,' and, as they 'had suffered very severely they were outrageous and would commence a general massacre' if Boerstler did not immediately yield. The Americans surrendered. FitzGibbon later wrote:

*With respect to the affair with Captain [sic] Boerstler, not a shot was fired on our side by any but the Indians. They beat the American detachment into a state of terror, and the only share I claim is taking advantage of a favourable moment to offer them protection from the tomahawk and scalping knife.*

The Battle of the Beaver Dams was one of the most notable Aboriginal victories of the War of 1812 – for a cost of not more than twenty killed and wounded, the warriors had killed, wounded or captured 600 American soldiers.

The twin victories at Stoney Creek and Beaver Dams blunted the American campaign in the Niagara peninsula, but to the west, Procter and Tecumseh, after a deep, but unsuccessful, offensive into the Ohio Territory, were forced back to Amherstburg. Even this position soon proved untenable as the British supply lines depended



on their naval control of Lake Erie. The Americans had been feverishly constructing a squadron of warships at Presque' Isle, on the southern shore of that lake to mount a challenge. In early September, they managed to wrest control of the Lake after sinking or capturing the British squadron in battle. When news of this disaster reached Procter, he decided to retreat toward Burlington Bay (now Hamilton Harbour). He neglected, however, to inform Tecumseh or the thousands of warriors and their families camped in and around Amherstburg. Their suspicions became aroused, however, when they saw the British dismantling the fortifications of the post and loading supplies and ammunition into wagons for a retreat. At a council between Procter, his officers and the Aboriginal leaders, held on 18 September 1813, Tecumseh delivered a stinging rebuke to his British ally that summarized the disappointments and disasters that regularly occurred when Aboriginal peoples became involved in European conflicts. In what later became known as the 'yellow dog' speech, Tecumseh castigated Procter by likening him to 'a fat animal that carries its tail upon its back; but when affrighted, it drops it between its legs and runs off.'

Procter's mind was made up, however, and in late September his small army commenced a retreat towards Lake Ontario, accompanied by the reluctant Tecumseh and those of his followers who had not gone home in disgust at what they saw as another British betrayal. On

5 October, Tecumseh's old opponent, Major-General William Henry Harrison, caught up with them near the Moraviantown mission on the Thames River. Procter deployed his regular infantry badly and they were run down by Harrison's mounted troops, at which point the British general fled the battle. Tecumseh and his warriors fought well enough to let many of their British allies escape before they stubbornly retired through the woods. Tecumseh was not with them – killed during the battle, his body was spirited away by his warriors to be placed in an unknown grave. Harrison's victorious troops included many Kentucky frontiersmen who displayed 'peculiar Cruelty to the Families of the Indians who had not Time to escape, or conceal Themselves.' The Americans remained in control of the southwestern portions of Upper Canada until the end of the conflict.

The last months of the year brought renewed success to British arms. In October and November, two American armies moving on Montreal were stopped by the twin victories at Chateauguay and Crysler's Farm and Aboriginal warriors participated in both actions. But the disastrous defeat at the Thames, and the death of Tecumseh, marked the end of the military power of the Northwest peoples. Although some of the nations continued to fight on, and achieved some success at Prairie du Chien on the upper Mississippi in 1814, most of the nations either made a separate peace with the United States or fled to British territory.



**Battle of Moraviantown on the Thames, 5 October 1813**

The defeat of the British and aboriginal force in this battle took place near modern London, Ontario. Tecumseh was killed in the fighting but his followers spirited his body away to be buried in an unmarked grave.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-041031)*





**Deputation of Aboriginal Nations from the Mississippi, 1814**

In the spring of 1814, a delegation of aboriginal leaders representing the nations of the west travelled to Quebec City to meet Sir George Prevost, the commander-in-chief, British North America. Note the sword worn by one of the warriors. Also note the black warrior. The adoption of strangers was much more commonplace in Aboriginal than in white society. This man was perhaps an escaped slave.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-134461)*



## The End of the War and the Treaty of Ghent

By 1814, the third year of the war, military campaigns were waged largely by increasing numbers of British and American regular troops who engaged in a number of pitched battles in the Niagara peninsula and Lake Champlain valley. Although the Aboriginal nations from the Northwest and their allies from the Canadas participated in some of these engagements, they did so as auxiliaries and their activities were less crucial to the outcomes of the battles.

In August 1814, negotiations to end the war began in the Dutch city of Ghent. Mindful of the disastrous omission of the Aboriginal peoples from the Treaty of Paris, which had ended the Revolutionary War, the British negotiators came to the table demanding that the Aboriginal allies of Great Britain should be included in the treaty and ‘a definite boundary to be settled for their territory.’ The Americans were even more shocked when they learned that ‘the object of the British government was, that the Indians should remain as a permanent barrier between our western settlements, and the adjacent British province,’ and that neither nation ‘should ever hereafter have the right to purchase, or acquire any part of the territory thus recognized, as belonging to the Indians.’ The British position was totally unacceptable to the United States, who had about a hundred thousand citizens living in the proposed Indian Territory. Negotiations stalled as a result.

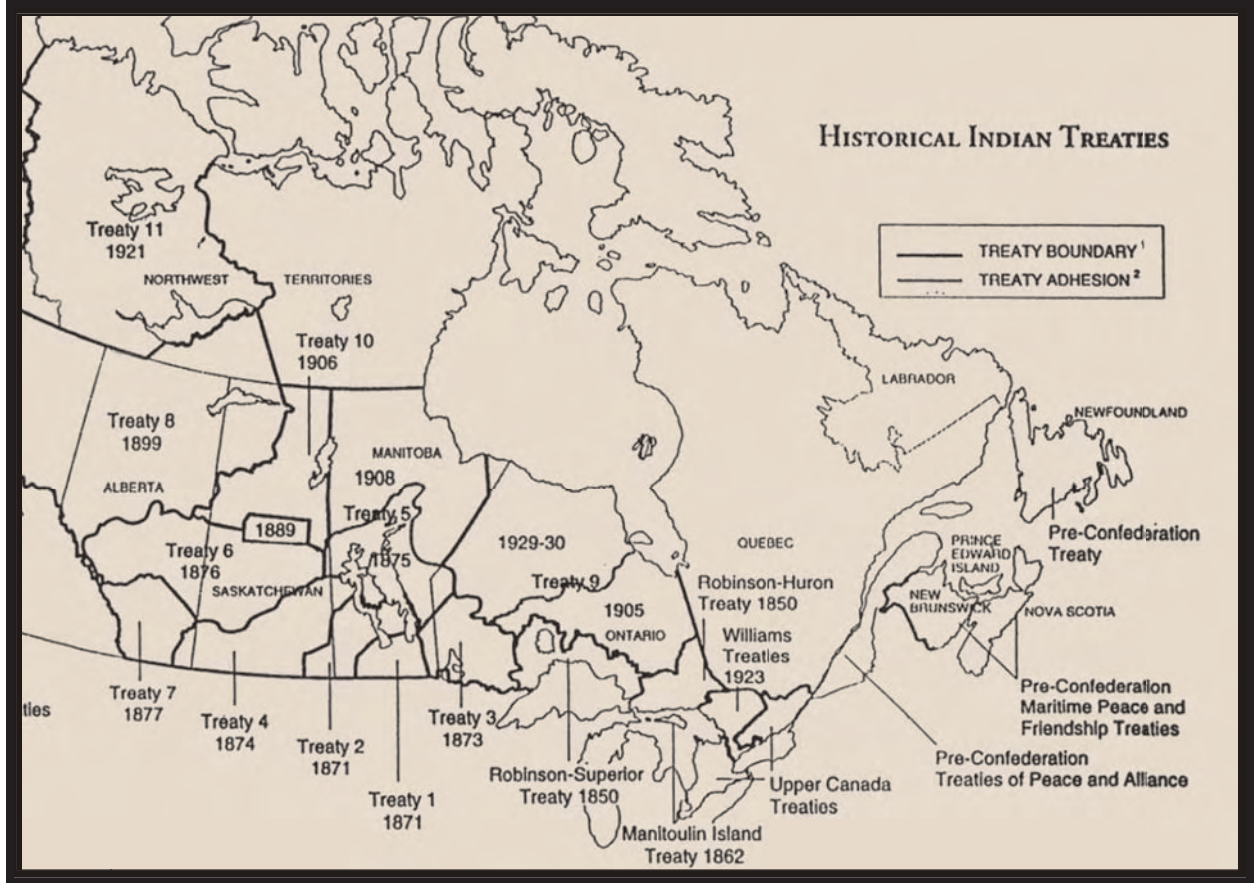
After much discussion on the subject, the American delegates suggested instead that the final treaty include ‘a reciprocal and general stipulation of amnesty covering

all persons, red as well as white, in the enjoyment of rights possessed at the commencement of the war.’ The British negotiators rejected this but, after consultation with London, they were instructed to drop the demand for the creation of a barrier state. Instead, they propose the following article for inclusion in the treaty:

*The United States of America engage to put an end immediately after the ratification of the present Treaty, to hostilities with all the Tribes or Nations of Indians, with whom they may be at war at the time of such ratification, and forthwith to restore to such Tribes or Nations respectively all the possessions, rights and privileges, which they may have enjoyed or been entitled to in 1811, previous to the hostilities.*

*Provided always, that such Tribes or Nations shall agree to desist from all hostilities against the United States of America, their Citizens, and subjects, upon the ratification of the present Treaty being notified to such Tribes or Nations, and shall so desist accordingly.*

There is little doubt that the Aboriginal peoples contemplated by the authors of this draft article were those residing on American territory, particularly those Northwest nations of Tecumseh’s Confederacy. The specific reference to the year 1811, when conflict broke out in the northwest, and not 1812 when the United States had declared war on Britain, makes this clear. After much discussion the American delegates accepted this proposal and it appeared as Article IX of the Treaty of Ghent, which was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814.



### Historical Indian Treaties

Following the War of 1812, British North American and U.S. border tensions stabilized somewhat while Aboriginal populations continued to decline and non-Aboriginal immigration increased dramatically. No longer courted as economic partners in peacetime, nor as military allies during war, British North American colonial governments came to regard First Nations as impediments to agricultural and industrial development. The subsequent expansion of the Canadian confederation was premised upon the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and the attainment of their lands by treaty, legislation or otherwise. During this era, the extent to which Aboriginal peoples attempted to – or were permitted to – participate in various domestic or imperial military undertakings in support of the Crown varied from region to region and from decade to decade.

*Archaeological Resource Management in a Lands Claim Context, Parks Canada, 1997*

Three days later, the British government sent a copy of the treaty to Sir George Prevost and drew his attention to the articles relating to Aboriginal peoples ‘that may be at war with either of the two contracting parties.’ Prevost was told to assure them that the Crown ‘would not have consented to make peace with the United States of America unless those Nations or tribes which had taken part with us, had been included in the Pacification.’ He was to use his ‘utmost endeavours’ to induce the Aboriginal peoples living in the United States to conclude separate peace treaties with the American government ‘as we could not be justified in offering them further assistance if they should persist in Hostilities.’

The War of 1812 secured the continued existence of British North America under British rule, and the role played by Aboriginal warriors in that defence had been substantial. Indeed in some of the early battles it had been decisive. Unfortunately, the outcome of the war was less positive for the Aboriginal peoples of the Great Lakes-Ohio region, as it marked the end of their long efforts to defend their autonomy and homelands from the European and American settlement frontier. Thereafter, the Native peoples of the Northeastern portions of the continent would not be able to defend themselves by military means. Yet 1815 would not be the last time that Aboriginal peoples were called upon to defend Canada.



Studio photo taken in July 1882 of the surviving Six Nations warriors who fought with the British in the War of 1812. Throughout the remainder of the 19th century the personal example and high local profile of veterans like these ensured the survival of the military service tradition in Aboriginal communities across eastern and central Canada. Pictured from left to right in Brantford in 1882 are Grand River war of 1812 veterans Jacob Warner (aged ninety-two), John Tutlee (aged ninety-one) and John Smoke Johnson (aged ninety-three).  
*Library and Archives Canada (C-085127)*

*In Defence of their Homelands*





# Chapter Four

# *Transforming Relationships, 1815-1902*

The end of the War of 1812 marked the end of an era in Canadian history. From 1815 onward, Aboriginal peoples in the Eastern portions of the country quickly lost their military and political power beneath a tide of immigration. The 60,000 European inhabitants of Upper Canada prior to 1812 had exploded to more than 400,000 by the 1830s, as disease continued to whittle away at the indigenous population. This demographic reality gave the European residents the confidence to disregard the military potential of tribal or national contingents of Aboriginal warriors. Instead, the British colonial authorities began to look at Aboriginal communities as administrative challenges rather than as sources of potent military allies. The 19th Century brought profound alterations in the relationship between the British, and later Canadians, and Aboriginal peoples.

Another important historical process underway was the progressive expansion of Imperial authority and colonial settlement into the west and the north. This occurred gradually through the fur trade under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay Company. The company functioned as an aloof and somewhat indifferent governing agency for the territories it had been granted as a trade monopoly – Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territory (essentially most of Western and Northern Canada). In reality,

Aboriginal peoples lived as they wished, subject only to the political, social and military realities of the fur trade. Through the latter half of the 19th Century, this distant presence was increasingly replaced by colonial settlement on the Pacific coast and in the Prairies. More significant for the Aboriginal peoples of the west and north was the extension of state authority and administrative control to the region after 1869. At that point, the Hudson's Bay Company handed over control of Rupert's

## **Nicholas Vincent Isawahoni, a Huron Chief, holding a wampum belt, 1825**

Even if colonial or subsequent Dominion governments were unwilling or unable to do so, Aboriginal groups steadfastly retained the knowledge of their unique relationship with the Crown during peace and war throughout the 19th century into the 20th century and beyond.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-38948)*



Land to the new dominion government in Ottawa, thereby bringing more than a hundred thousand Aboriginal people under the wing of the state. By the dawn of the 20th Century, government authority over indigenous peoples was steadily tightened from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Consolidation of the British, and later Canadian, grip on the northern part of the continent occurred gradually, and recast the indigenous population from independent allies to legal wards of the Crown. Treaties between Aboriginal nations and the imperial/colonial authorities were critical to this transformation. The treaty process grew out of the

Royal Proclamation in 1763, and became prevalent in the wake of the American Revolution as Imperial authorities sought land from the Mississaugas on which to settle the United Empire Loyalists, including indigenous Loyalists like the Six Nations. Treaties were important for both parties as a means to resolve disputes over land and resources before they could escalate into conflicts between Aboriginal people and settlers. The early land cession treaties were usually one-off arrangements with land exchanged for a lump sum of goods and/or money. The form of the agreements evolved through the first half of the 19th Century, however, coalescing in the Robinson-Huron and Superior treaties with the Ojibwa (Anishnabeg) in 1850. Based on this model subsequent treaties would generally provide for an extinguishment of what is now termed 'Aboriginal title' to a wide tract of traditionally occupied land. In exchange, the Crown agreed to pay small annuities to each member of a band in perpetuity, guarantee fishing and hunting rights to all land surrendered, and set aside a piece of land to be held in common for each band as a reserve. As the government concluded the eleven numbered treaties across the Northwest from the 1870s to the early 20th Century, additional obligations were conceded to adept Aboriginal negotiators including government-supplied medical care, education and support in the transition to agriculture.

The movement onto Indian reserves symbolised the shift from free peoples to administered wards, though in principle the reserve was intended as a protective measure.



**Anishnabeg men at Coldwater (Lake Simcoe area) in 1844**

Several hundred Anishnabeg at numerous locations across Upper Canada – including groups to the north and east of Toronto – mobilized in support of Crown forces on many occasions between 1830 and 1840.

Watercolour by Titus Hibbert Ware (Metropolitan Toronto Library T 14386)





**Lone canoeist on the St. Lawrence River, with the Windmill and Fort Wellington in the background, c. 1840**

Riverine and inshore smallcraft operations were a First Nations speciality. A principal employment of First Nations militias in 1837-38 was to patrol the water frontiers of Upper and Lower Canada. In addition to giving advance warning of suspicious activity, they were useful in apprehending deserters of British Army garrisons. While such deserters were a perennial problem for military commanders, the bounties paid for their return provided casual but steady income to First Nations located near British outposts.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-11863)*

In practice, reserves were turned into social laboratories where the language and values of Christianity and the Western world were to be inculcated into the inhabitants. In 1876, the transition to administered peoples was

consolidated in a single piece of Canadian legislation, the Indian Act. Thereafter, Canadian Indian administrators became increasingly forthright in pressing the agenda of assimilation as the logical solution to

what was termed the 'Indian problem.' Yet though the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Euro-Canadian state had altered profoundly since 1815, a military connection persisted.

### Rebellions

This military connection was renewed in 1837-38, when the majority of Aboriginal peoples in Upper and Lower Canada chose either to remain neutral, or to actively support the British efforts to suppress the Rebellions in both provinces. The outbreak of those violent political protests followed years of increasingly inflammatory rhetoric from small but vocal minorities of agitators within the respective provinces. In each instance, there were calls by radical reformers, labelled *patriotes* in Lower Canada, for the elimination of patronage-riddled, non-democratic administrative systems and their replacement with American-style republican governments. The clashes in Lower Canada ultimately proved the more violent affairs, in part because of the added religious and ethno-linguistic dimensions that were not present in Upper Canada.

The first overt act of the Rebellion in Lower Canada drew the Caughnawaga (Kahnawake) Mohawk into the fray on 4 November 1837, when a group of *patriotes*, 75 strong, under the command of Joseph-Narcisse Cardinal, came in search of weapons. In his *Rebellion: The Rising in French Canada 1837*, Joseph Schull recounts what happened:

*An Indian woman, chasing a stray cow, had seen the approach of the party and had run to inform the chief. She found him at early mass, and there had been a prompt exodus from the church. By the time the patriotes entered the road to the village, the woods on either side were thick with Indians. The chief appeared alone, grave and inquiring. What was the purpose of this unannounced visit? He was gravely informed by Cardinal of the patriotes need of weapons. By what authority, the chief asked, was such a request made? 'By this,' Cardinal replied, whipping a pistol from his pocket and pointing it at the chief's head.*

*It was his last warlike gesture. The chief's hand shot out to knock the pistol aside. A blood-curdling war-whoop shattered the Sunday calm, and a hundred armed braves were around the patriotes. Of the seventy-five who came, only eleven escaped, and the chief was prompt in his disposition of the others.... By mid-morning the warriors from Caughnawaga had crossed over to Lachine to deliver sixty-four rebels to the Lachine volunteer cavalry....*

Over the next weeks, violence in Lower Canada escalated, beginning in the streets of Montreal with running brawls between gangs of *patriotes*, known as *Les Fils de*



#### Indian village at St. Regis

Iroquois and other First Nations groups – including those at St. Regis (Akwesasne), Kahnawake, and Kanesatake – also wishing to ensure the stability of Crown government, likewise supported the Loyalist cause during the Rebellions in Lower Canada.

Watercolour by W.H. Bartlett (McCord Museum collection, McGill University)

*la Liberté*, and the loyalist Doric Club. The Riot Act was read and British troops quickly restored order, but civil unrest was growing in the countryside and open conflict seemed imminent. On 16 November, the authorities issued warrants for the arrest of 26 *patriote* leaders. British regulars clashed with rebels in the first major engagement at St. Denis on 23 November. Though initially rebuffed, the British soundly defeated a *patriote* force at St. Charles two days later and in mid-December thrashed a rebel force at St. Eustache, effectively ending the Lower Canadian rebellion only a week after that in Upper Canada had begun. Such as they were, the principal incidents (clashes would be too strong a word) in Upper Canada were the laughable encounter of rebels and loyalists at what is now the vicinity of Yonge and

Dundas Streets in Toronto. There, rebels under the command of William Lyon Mackenzie marched south to take control of the provincial capital in early December. A tragic comedy followed: both sides fled from the initial exchange of fire, before skirmishing around Montgomery's Tavern (a few kilometres further north) resulted in the deaths of a dozen rebels and the wounding of twice that number. Elsewhere in Upper Canada the Rebellion played out in a number of relatively minor and brief



episodes, including: the rapid dispersal (without any fighting at all) of the London District rebels; the rebel seizure of Navy Island, in the Niagara river; the so-called Battle of the Short Hills, at St. John's on the Niagara escarpment west of Thorold; the capture and burning of the American steamer *Caroline*, which had been supplying the Navy Island rebels, by white loyalists; and abortive raids on Pelee Island and Windsor.

The government expected the support of Aboriginal communities in the crisis. John Macaulay, civil secretary for Upper Canada, circulated an order in November 1838 that directed colonial officials:

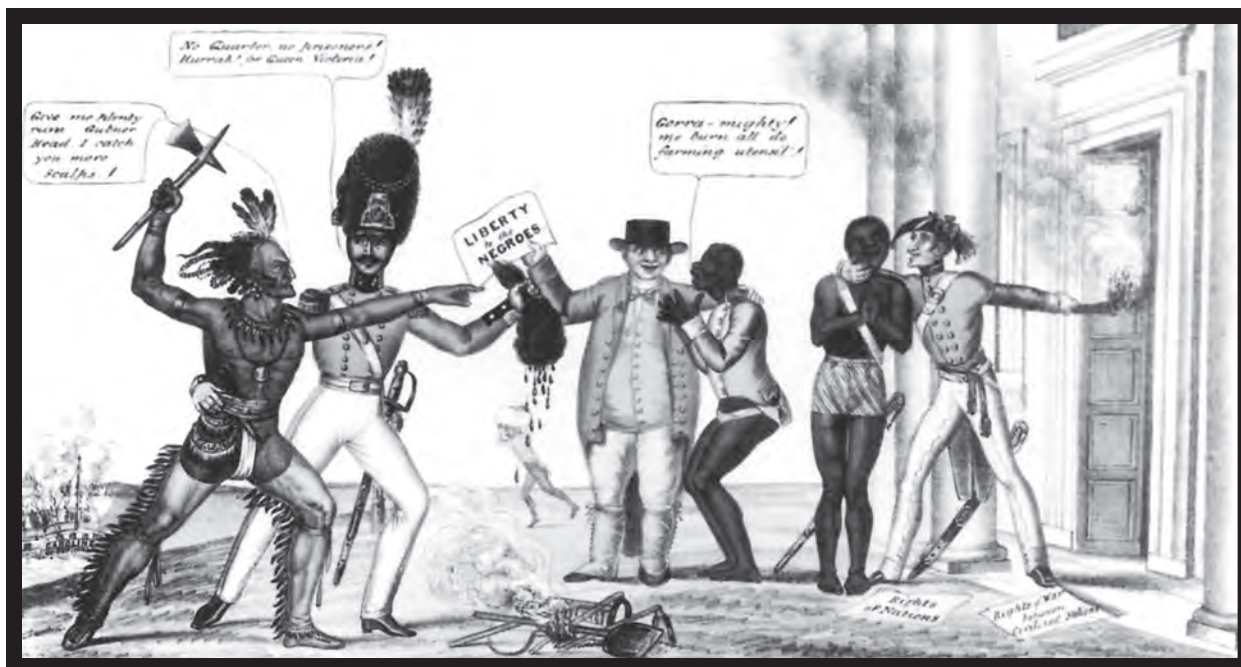
*The extensive organization of a force within the U.S. Frontier for the purpose of invading their [sic] Province having become fully known to the Lt. Governor I am directed to request, that you will hold the Indians in your neighbourhood in readiness to take to the field & act with promptitude & effect under your command on the first notice, which you may receive of actual invasion by a foreign enemy or of insurrection in expectation of foreign aid, in any part of the province.*

Understandably, not all Aboriginal peoples were that keen on fighting the white man's battles. Disciples of Pazhekezhikquashkum at the St. Clair Mission (present-day Sarnia, Ontario) told their people:

*... we consider it best to spread our matts to sit-down & smoke our pipes and to let the people who like powder & ball fight their own battles. We have some time ago counselled with the Indians around us & we are all agreed to remain quiet and we hope that all the Indians will do so, as we can gain nothing by fighting but may lose everything ... Should such as are ... foolish be induced to commence war on the whites of any party, we should all be more hated by the whites than we are now. We would just observe that we cannot be compelled to go & fight for any party, we mention this fact in order that should you be called on you may know that you are free men & under the control of no one who has authority to make you take up arms.*

Nevertheless, some Loyalists feared that even if the Indians did not join the rebels they might rise on their own behalf. Rumour was rife. 'A report has reached us that 400 Indians had come down on Toronto and slaughtered a number of the inhabitants ... this seems to be unfounded,' diarist Catherine Parr Traill wrote on 7 December.

In fact, most Aboriginal people preferred the existing government and were fearful of effects that an American-style republic might have on their status and well-being. As a result, there were numerous examples of Aboriginal



contingents offering their support to British authorities and loyalist militia commanders in both the Canadas. A day or so before the fight at St. Eustache, when it still seemed that there might be much fighting to be done, about 200 Caughnawaga Mohawk joined loyalist forces around Montreal and Lachine. ‘Every Warrior in Caughnawaga was crossing to join the Lachine Brigade,’ recalled John Fraser, one of its white members. ‘A cheer of welcome from the ... band of Volunteers greeted the arrival of the Indian Warriors.’ Grand River Iroquois, under William Johnson Kerr, and Tyendinaga (Deseronto) Mohawks, under John Culbertson, helped suppress both

**“Give me plenty rum, Gubner Head”**

Foreseeing the likely outcomes for their respective peoples in the event of a reform seizure of power – including possible annexation by the U.S. – First Nations and Blacks were willing to support the continuity of the Crown government in Upper Canada during the rebellions of 1837-38. In so doing they became the subject of racist attacks by reform propagandists.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-40831)*

domestic rebels and American-based ‘Patriots.’ Kerr proudly reported that, ‘the Indian Warriors turned out with alacrity, and joined their Brethren the Militia in defence of the Country, its laws and institutions, at a period when there were no regular troops in the Country

... to their honor be it spoken, they have neither Indian Radicals nor Indian Rebels amongst them.' Tyendinaga offered to provide enough men to form a rifle company, although whether it was actually formed is unclear. Anthony Manahan, a militia officer, wrote to Colonel James FitzGibbon explaining that 'a band of Indians here with Chief John Culbertson ... have expressed a wish to join my Regiment as a Volunteer Rifle Company under Culbertson as their captain .... I beg you think favourably of the Indian Rifle Company. Such a company will do more than a Regiment of Regular Infantry to reduce the turbulent, by the fears they entertain [of Indian warriors].'

Sir George Arthur, who succeeded Francis Bond Head as the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, subsequently wrote to Lord Glenelg, the Colonial Secretary in England, explaining and justifying the employment of Aboriginal warriors:

*In more than one instance since last Autumn have the Indians been called out in defence of the Country. They furnished a large force to protect the Niagara Frontier last winter, when it was menaced by the armed assemblage of Canadian Refugees, and American adventurers, who had taken possession of Navy Island; and on that occasion, as well as on others when their services were required by my predecessor, their conduct was perfectly unexceptionable.*

*In employing them in the month of June last, I had it for my Chief object to cut off the communication between the mixed band of brigands and insurgents, who were in arms at the Short Hills, and the disaffected portion of the London and Talbot Districts, and to intercept all fugitives. The Indians were thus employed on a duty for which they were peculiarly well qualified ....*

*The Warriors of these tribes, who promptly obeyed my summons, were under the guidance of human leaders who readily enforced my earnest injunctions for the maintenance of the strictest order and a scrupulous observance of the merciful rules of civilized warfare ....*

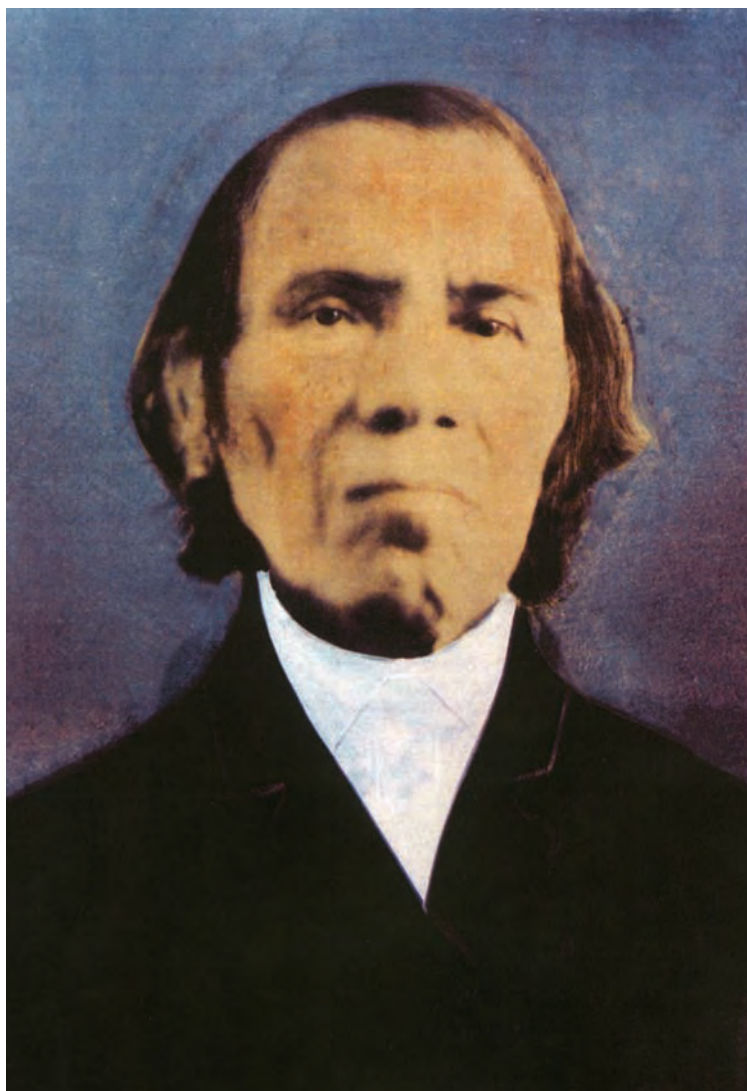
27 soldiers and nearly 300 rebels were killed in the Lower Canada campaign, and far fewer in the Upper Canada rebellion. In all, more than a dozen rebels went to the gallows, with dozens more banished to the British penal colony in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) off the south-eastern shore of Australia. All of those men, as well as some of the key leaders that had escaped to the United States, were eventually pardoned. In the end, Aboriginal warriors saw little combat, but their aid was still sought by British and loyalists alike. Their military relationship was reaffirmed, albeit modestly, by these failed Canadian rebellions.



## Militia

Despite the relative peace and stability in Canada through the rest of the 19th Century, a military dimension was never absent. It was evident in the treaties that the Crown negotiated with the Aboriginal peoples of the west. They were encouraged to cease all fighting with Europeans or other Aboriginal nations and to live in peace. Importantly, several Aboriginal groups expressed concern that signing a treaty would obligate them to being compelled to fight for the Crown. Crown negotiator Alexander Morris assured the Saulteaux at the negotiation of Treaty 3 (also known as the North-West Angle Treaty) in 1873 that ‘The English never call the Indians out of the country to fight their battles.’ Similarly at Fort Pitt in 1876, the Cree were told, ‘In case of war you ask not to be compelled to fight. I trust there will be no war, but if it should occur I thing [sic] the Queen would leave you to yourselves. I am sure she would not ask her Indian children to fight for her unless they wished.’ These verbal assurances would prove significant in the conscription crises of the World Wars of the 20th Century. At the time, such examples demonstrated that the military capacity of indigenous warriors, though latent, had not become irrelevant, either to Aboriginal peoples or to the state.

But neither the imperial nor the Canadian government formalised a role or structure for indigenous people in the Canadian defence establishment during the 19th Century. By 1855 the old, unpaid, Sedentary Militia had fallen into desuetude. The government of the Canadas – Upper and Lower Canada had been re-united as Canada East and Canada West in 1840 – felt it necessary to introduce a new Militia Act, retaining the principle of universal



**Coloured tin type portrait of Cornelius Moses**

Cornelius Moses was one of the Grand River band of Delaware who organized a Home Guard for local defence at the time of the 1866 Fenian incursion at Ridgeway in Canada West. Their subsequent efforts to formally incorporate as a volunteer Militia company would, however, remain unsuccessful for another quarter-century. In the mid-19th century, colonial officials in some regions were initially suspicious of Natives who sought to organize themselves militarily, although the Confederation-era volunteer militia movement did have its supporters and patrons within specific communities having strong United Empire Loyalist ties. These surfaced again during the South African War and the First World War, with calls for units composed entirely of Native Canadians.

*J. Moses collection.*

unpaid military service which could be called upon in times of emergency. The Act also creating a new Active or Volunteer Militia, 5,000 strong, who would be equipped by the government and paid to train ten days a year. Faced with the threat of American expansionism, the Canadian government soon doubled the authorized strength. Yet, outside a few local instances of small Aboriginal militia units, there was no corollary in Canada to the American example of segregated indigenous regular units or scouting units. In part, this was because the lesser incidence of conflict in the Canadian West did not create the same need for such forces.

The very structure and function of the militia in Canadian society during the Victorian Age also worked against a place for Aboriginal warriors. After the reorganisation and expansion of the Active Militia, service became increasingly fashionable and the new militia units soon achieved considerable social status as exclusive men's clubs. They competed with each other in drill and shooting. Often, men were expected to donate their pay to the unit, to be used for purchasing trophies or uniform adornments, or paying for regimental dinners. By 1862 the Maritime colonies had followed suit, 'so that there were soon 18,000 of them happily parading in their spare time in towns and cities all across British North America.' The key words in that quotation are 'towns and cities.' There were a few rural units, with companies based in different villages, but most were established at battalion strength

in the larger centres of population where it was easier to gather together men. This urban-elite organisation tended to marginalise Aboriginal peoples whose communities were mostly rural in nature. It also demonstrated the beginning of a shift away from prior practices of seeking Aboriginal men as generalist fighters, especially in tribal or national contingents. This process would be evident in the Prairie West during the efforts of the Métis people to exert some influence over Canada's western expansion in the 1870s and 1880s.

### **Métis Resistance**

Not all dealings between the Canadian state and Aboriginal peoples in the 19th Century were amicable. In 1869-70, as the young government of Canada prepared for the handover of Rupert's Land and the Northwest to its jurisdiction, it neglected to consult the existing inhabitants, either the First Nations or the mixed-heritage Métis community in the Red River region. Under the leadership of a young, dynamic man named Louis Riel, the residents of Red River blocked the transfer of power to ensure the protection of their individual and collective rights to their religion, language and land, as well as to secure a political role in any new provincial government. The Métis declared a provisional government and seized Fort Garry to demonstrate their determination and force the Canadian leadership to negotiate. Riel and his colleagues secured guarantees to create a new province of Manitoba. Canadian authorities, however, dispatched

an expeditionary force to Red River. Under the command of British regular officer, Colonel Garnet Wolseley, the Red River Expedition was sent to assert Crown authority. Mohawks, Plains and Swampy Cree, and a considerable number of Ontario and Quebec Métis, were among the nearly 400 civilians contracted to transport the troops and their equipment.

The presence and participation of experienced Aboriginal boatmen and voyageurs in the ranks of the Expedition's transportation corps was fundamental to its successful arrival in Manitoba. Wolseley had become familiar with the capabilities of Kahnawake Mohawk boatmen in 1862 when, as a lieutenant-colonel, he had been assigned as an instructor to the Militia officers' training school at La Prairie, across the St. Lawrence from Montreal and adjacent to the Kahnawake reserve. Now he called upon Simon Dawson, a Dominion land surveyor and civil engineer, to make the transportation arrangements for the expeditionary force, including the recruitment of some 140 Indian and Métis *voyageurs*.

The successful movement of some 400 British regulars and 700 militiamen with all their necessary equipment and supplies from Collingwood, on Georgian Bay, to Fort Garry – without the loss of a single man – was a logistical triumph. During the arduous voyage, the Expedition traversed 47 portages and ran some 82 kilometres of rapids. The soldiers had nothing but praise for

their indigenous chauffeurs. Lieutenant Henry Riddell of the British 60th (The King's Royal Rifle Corps) noted that: 'Fortunate was the officer who secured for his boat the skilful Iroquois, the finest boatmen in Canada.' The expeditionary force was divided into 21 'brigades,' each consisting of about 50 men. Each boat carried ten or 12 soldiers, with a *voyageur* bowman and steersman. There were also three *canots de maître* and a number of smaller birchbark canoes manned by *voyageurs*. One of these canoes, manned by Aboriginal paddlers, was Colonel Wolseley's personal choice of transport. In it he could move rapidly from one end of the line of march to the other. His experience with these Aboriginal voyageurs would lead to his request for their services years later in the Nile Expedition.

By the time the Canadian force arrived in Red River, negotiations between the Métis and Canada were completed and Riel had fled into hiding. At the order of Riel's provisional government, a pro-Canadian Orangeman by the name of Thomas Scott had been executed, and many Protestants in Ontario howled for Riel to be hanged. Although the Métis continued to have their grievances, even after the creation of Manitoba in 1870, they still turned out in force the following year to oppose a potentially serious threat to the new province. There was, as yet, no organized militia to resist an incursion from the south that materialised in 1871. Usually labelled as a Fenian raid (the Fenians were an Irish American brotherhood created





**Left: Archibald acknowledging Riel's and Royal's offer of Métis assistance against the Fenians, 8 October 1871.**  
*Glenbow Museum (NA 22-33)*

**Right: An unidentified Métis hunter on horseback c. 1890.**

*Photograph by R. Randolph, Glenbow Museum*

A formal offer of Métis assistance in countering the Fenian threat in Manitoba in 1871 was tendered under the political leadership of Louis Riel. Irregular units of armed Métis horsemen acting as mounted infantry were mobilized for local defence in small units based on methods adapted from Métis buffalo hunt, with elected "captains" leading mounted squads of ten "soldiers" each. This same organization was used again by Gabriel Dumont during the Northwest rebellion in 1885. Other tactics included the construction of camouflaged rifle pits dug beneath barricades of encircled Red River carts. Such tactics were successful in defeating neighbouring First Nations opponents with whom the Métis were in competition over access to the same dwindling buffalo herds. The battle with Dakota Sioux at the Grand Coteau in July 1851 is the best documented example of this.

to secure Irish independent from Britain), this attack was hardly that because the council of the Fenian Brotherhood never approved it. It was inspired and organized by William O'Donahue, the one-time treasurer of Riel's short-lived provisional government, and was intended to de-stabilize Canadian and British control over the region. He managed to secure the support of a number of Fenians,

including 'General' O'Neill (the victor at Ridgeway) giving the movement some status.

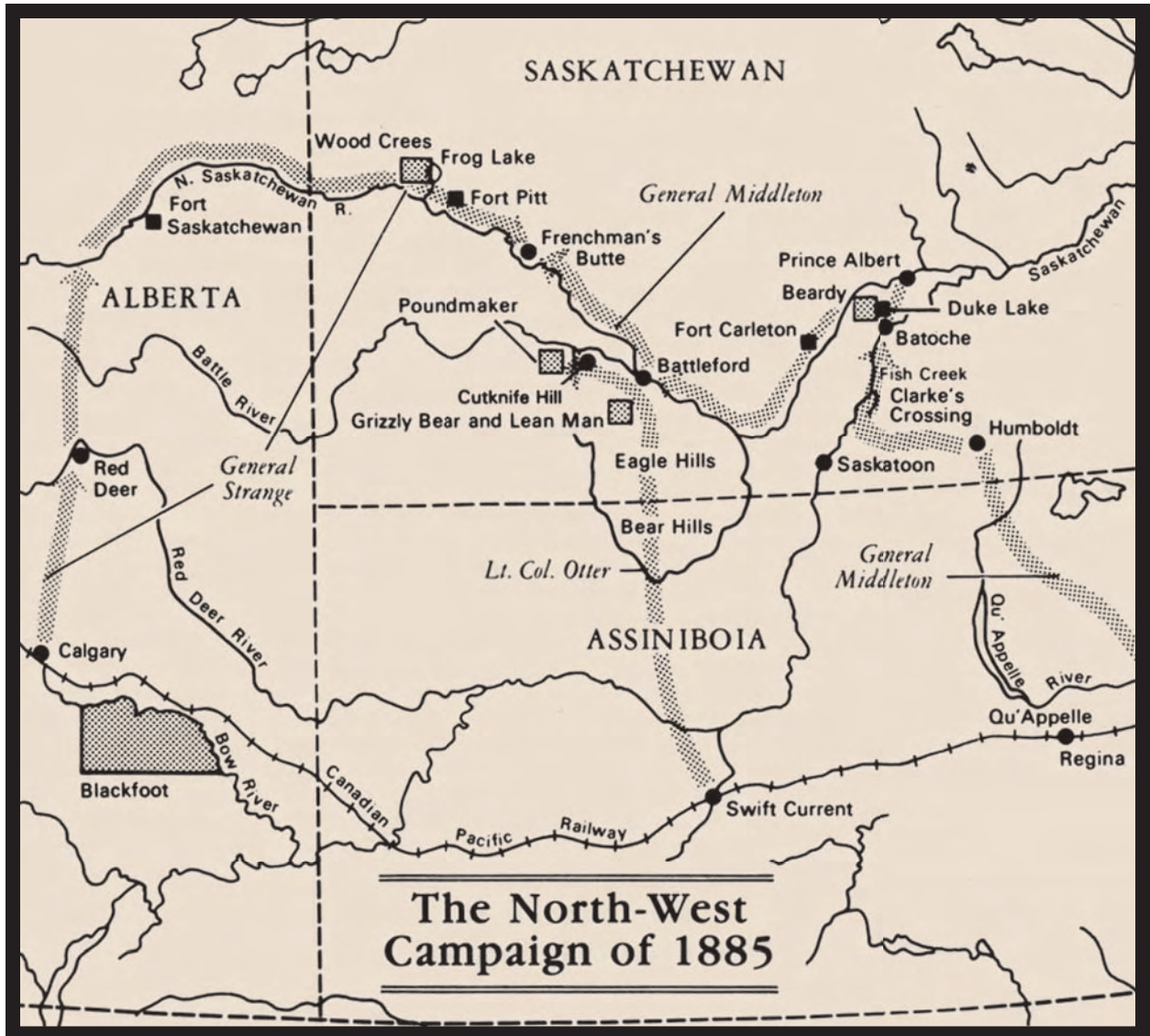
O'Donahue, of course, was relying on Red River Métis dissatisfaction with Ottawa. The Métis, however, after due deliberation, tendered a formal offer to assist the Canadian government in quashing any Fenian challenge.

In a formal declaration of loyalty, the Métis parishes of the Red River decided that ‘... being subjects of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, we believe it our duty to obey her, [and] that having received, through her representative, orders to meet to fight the Fenians, we do so and are resolved to follow the order which competent authorities shall give.’ Irregular units of Métis horsemen, acting as mounted infantry, mobilized in small units and adopted methods from the buffalo hunt, with elected ‘captains’ leading their mounted squads or platoons of ten ‘soldiers’ each. ‘Generally I hear it said that the English are really frightened,’ reported a St. Boniface clergyman. ‘If the Fenians really number 1,500, only the Métis horsemen can stop them. The English have said that the Métis count for nothing; now they are going to find out [what they do count for].’ The actual raiding force, perhaps 75 strong, crossed the border on 6 October, occupied the Canadian Customs House and looted a Hudson’s Bay Company store. The raiders immediately dispersed and fled upon hearing news of approaching American troops. American authorities, and some by the Fort Garry militia, subsequently arrested many of them, and Métis volunteers captured O’Donahue himself. All the Canadian prisoners were subsequently handed over to the Americans, though none of the raiders were ever brought to trial.

In the years that followed, the Métis began to leave Manitoba, partly pushed out by the tens of thousands of new settlers and partly drawn westward in pursuit of

the shrinking herds of buffalo. Temporary camps in the Qu’Appelle and Saskatchewan valleys gradually evolved into permanent settlements, where Métis families re-established themselves on farms in their traditional French style of long, narrow plots. Once again they petitioned the federal government to officially confirm their possession of these lands and for greater economic and political autonomy, but they met with little success. Frustrated, and under increasing economic strain by the early 1880s, the Métis and some European residents of the region decided to appeal to their old hero, Louis Riel. At this time Riel was a school teacher in Montana, and he agreed in November 1884 to return and help lead the Métis. He had spent much of the last decade in asylums and in exile in the United States, but he remained a dynamic and charismatic individual.

Unable to gain a hearing from the Canadian government, Riel sought to follow a similar course to that of 1869-70, seizing arms and declaring a provisional government to undertake negotiations with Ottawa. Unfortunately in this instance, the process provoked violent conflict almost immediately. Riel and a force of Métis horsemen, seeking weapons and ammunition from the store in Duck Lake, collided with a column of North West Mounted Police and mounted volunteers out of Fort Carleton. The ensuing clash was a clear Métis victory, but thereafter, events rapidly snowballed beyond Riel’s abilities to control them. Unlike 1870, the federal government was not



The North-West campaign of 1885

*A Military History of Canada, Desmond Morton (Department of National Defence)*



constrained by any legal ambiguities over sovereignty in the Northwest. Furthermore, the existence of telegraph lines and a near-complete rail link to Ottawa meant that information and troops could travel very rapidly to respond to the crisis. The Wolseley expedition in 1870 had taken months to complete their arduous voyage to Manitoba. In 1885, the lead elements of the Canadian militia were marching north from Qu'Appelle, behind Aboriginal scouts, within two weeks of the Duck Lake clash. Despite the crafty military leadership of Gabriel Dumont, the roughly 350 experienced Métis fighters concentrated in Batoche could not withstand the onslaught of the inexperienced, but much larger, Canadian force under the command of the British Major-General Frederick Middleton. The defeat of the Métis at the Battle of Batoche in May 1885, and the surrender of Riel a few days later, effectively broke the resistance, though it was not the only fighting to occur.

There were several skirmishes between Mounties, the militia and some of the Plains First Nations in the region. It is important to emphasize, however, that most of the Aboriginal population in the Prairies wanted no part in what they saw as a Métis adventure. Although Riel claimed to speak in their interests and the level of anger and despair among the Plains peoples was high, prominent Plains Cree and Assiniboine leaders like Big Bear, Poundmaker, Little Pine and Piapot had spent years working for a political resolution to their treaty

grievances with the federal government. Similarly, the powerful Blackfoot Confederacy of what is now southern Alberta chose to honour its treaty commitments and remained aloof from the hostilities. Had all of the estimated 25,000 to 35,000 First Nations people living in the region (as opposed to roughly 2,000 Euro-Canadians) thrown their weight behind Riel and the Métis, the Canadian government might have been faced with a military situation beyond its resources. As it turned out, some Plains Cree under Big Bear, Poundmaker and other chiefs became involved in the fighting, usually incited either by warlike elements of their own population (Frog Lake Massacre) or by having to defend themselves from attacks by Canadian militia (Cut Knife Hill and Frenchman's Butte). This was the exception rather than the rule: as Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser demonstrate in their book, most remained 'loyal till death.'

Most Métis communities also stayed clear of the fighting. The dominion government recruited units of mounted Métis riflemen and scouts from other regions to patrol the frontier with the United States, to guard the lines of communication and transport, and to act as security against cross-border arms smuggling and the possible movement of Métis or Indian reinforcements in support of Riel. Jean Louis Legare, originally from Quebec, was the chief resident trader for the Hudson's Bay Company in the Wood Mountain area. He explained to Edgar Dewdney, the lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories, that the



Left: Dog Child, a North West Mounted Police scout, and his wife, members of the Blackfoot Nation, c. 1890. *Library and Archives Canada (PA-195224)*



Right: Métis men working for the Boundary Commission 1872-74: the 49th Rangers. *Manitoba Archives (N14060)*

During the westward and northward expansion of Dominion government, paramilitary organizations like the North West Mounted Police (left) and the British North American Boundary Commission (right) routinely engaged local Aboriginal people, both men and women, as civilian scouts, guides, trackers, outfitters and translators. The self-styled “49th Rangers” composed of Red River Métis, provided an armed mounted escort to Boundary Commission surveyors in 1872-1874.

Métis of Willow Branch and Wood Mountain were ‘in a starving condition [and] that they wished to remain there, so as not to be implicated in any way with the rebellion, and that they would be glad of any employment’ that might give them some relief. Thus, as would be the case in the 20th Century, economic necessity was often one of the premier motives motivating Métis and other Aboriginal involvement in military or paramilitary undertakings with the Canadian government. The North West Mounted Police found this arrangement perfectly

satisfactory, since the Métis patrols ‘fulfilled the double purpose of finding work for idle hands to do, and having the country thoroughly watched.’

Métis also served as individuals in primarily non-Aboriginal militia units. Indeed, one of them served in the three-man patrol to whom Riel surrendered after his defeat at Batoche, according to Harvey Dwight, the American-born general manager of the Great North-West Telegraph Company’s cable to Ottawa:

*Riel was captured today at noon by three scouts named Armstrong, D.H. Diehl and Howrie four miles north of Batoche's [sic]. The scouts had been out in the morning to scour the country, but these three spread from the main body, and just as they were coming out of some brush on an unfrequented trail leading to Batoche's they spied Riel with three companions. He was unarmed but they carried shot-guns.... No effort was made on his part to escape and after a brief conversation in which they expressed surprise at finding him there, Riel declared that he intended to give himself up. His only fear was that*

*he would be shot by the troop.... He was assured of a fair trial, which was all he seemed to want .... To avoid the main body of the scouts Riel was taken to a coulee near by and hidden while Diehl went off to corral a horse for him.*

Thomas Hourie (not Howrie) was a Métis serving with French's Scouts attached to Middleton's column. Whether Riel's trial was fair is still subject to intense historical debate, but he was found 'guilty' at the time and was hanged for high treason. Gabriel Dumont, Riel's adjutant and military commander, fled to the United States.



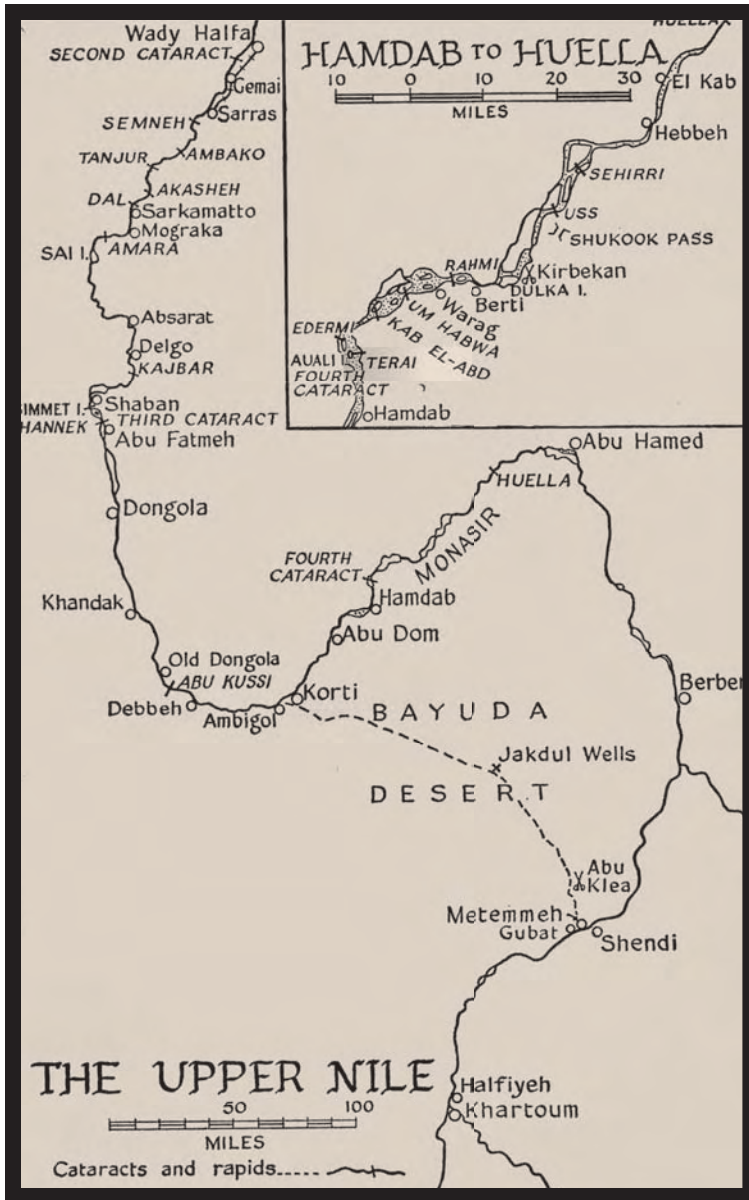
**Left: A Métis man, wearing a decorated jacket, who was a scout for the North West Mounted Police c. 1885.**  
*Photograph by Fred A. Russell, Kalamazoo Public Museum*

**Right: French and his men**

*Library and Archives Canada (C-18942)*

Local Métis and First Nations support for Louis Riel and his followers during the 1885 Northwest Rebellion was not complete. Specially raised units of mounted Métis riflemen and scouts, including the Wood Mountain Scouts attached to the North West Mounted Police (left), were recruited by the Dominion government to patrol the frontier with the United States, and to guard the lines of communication and transport. Thomas Hourie, a Métis serving with French's Scouts (right) in Middleton's column, was one of three civilian trackers credited with the actual apprehension of Riel. Prairie First Nations leaders like Crowfoot chose to respect the spirit of numerous treaty relationships previously ratified with the Crown.





The Upper Nile Valley  
 Department of National Defence

### Imperial Adventures in Africa

While some Aboriginal people were clashing against Canadian military forces in the Northwest, others were embarking on adventures in aid of British Imperial military operations far beyond Canada's shores. The first such excursion was the famed Nile Expedition of 1884-85, organised to save a British garrison under General Charles ('Chinese') Gordon which was trapped in the city of Khartoum by forces of the Mahdi – an Islamic holy leader who sought independence from Egypt and the establishment of an Islamic republic. Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley, of Red River fame, commanded the relief expedition. One of his first acts was to ask the Governor General of Canada 'to endeavour to engage 300 good voyageurs from Caughnawaga, St. Regis and Manitoba as steersmen in boats for Nile expedition.'

Much had changed in fourteen years and it was simply not possible to recruit 300 *voyageurs*. By 1884 the canoe men who had long made a profession of transporting people and supplies over great distances had mostly yielded to the railway. Expert rivermen of a different type were, however, readily available. In the woods of Quebec and Ontario, men felled trees and stacked logs on the river banks all winter; in the spring, when the ice broke, and thereafter all summer long, these 'shantymen' drove great rafts of logs downstream, through many rapids to the waiting sawmills. They had a broad knowledge



**Above: "The Canadian Voyageurs' first touch of the Nile",**  
**C.P. Stacey, The Nile Voyageurs, 1884-1885**

*The Graphic, London, November 22, 1884*

**Right: Frontispiece and titlepage of Louis Jackson, 1885,**  
**"Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: A narrative of what was**  
**seen and accomplished by the Contingent of North**  
**American Voyageurs who led the British Boat Expedition**  
**for the Relief of Khartoum up the Cataracts of the Nile."**

*By Louis Jackson, of Caughnawaga, Captain of the Contingent*

In 1884-85, Canadians serving as a unit took part for the first time in a military action overseas. Of the 367 civilian boathandlers constituting the Canadian Voyageur Contingent with the Nile Relief Expedition, no fewer than 86 were Indians from Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. An unspecified number of Métis also served. Depicted above, with British Army regulars and their Canadian boat crews aboard, are the specially constructed whalers used to transport the Expedition up the Nile. Pictured on the right, from the frontispiece and title page of his memoir of the expedition, is Louis Jackson, captain and foreman of the contingent of Kahnawake Mohawks.



*Transforming Relationships, 1815-1902*





#### **The Red River Expedition, 1877**

Kahnawake Mohawk boatmen, some Manitoba First Nations, and an unrecorded number of Ontario and Québec Métis were among the nearly 400 civilians contracted to transport troops and material during the Red River Expedition in 1877. Aboriginal employment as boatmen in the lumbering industry of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa River watersheds was one early example of Native participation in the emerging wage economy in central Canada. Later Kahnawake Mohawk economic pursuits included high steel construction as well as professional military service. The process by which Aboriginals undertook paid individual employment in support of colonial and Dominion military projects was complex and occurred over time as Native peoples and communities gained ever greater exposure to the mainstream wage economy. Initially hired at the time of the Red River Rebellion and the Nile Expedition as civilian labourers possessing specialized skills in boat handling and other tasks having a military application, only toward the end of the 19th century did Natives begin to consider enrolment as private soldiers in Crown military forces.

*Library and Archives Canada (C-134480)*



of river work, which was of some value, but they lacked the small boat and canoe skills of the *voyageurs*. Altogether, 367 men were recruited, of whom 86 were status Indians from Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. Fifty-six of them were Mohawks from Caughnawaga, captained by Louis Jackson, who subsequently wrote a little book about their experiences entitled *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt*. As the anonymous preface noted, ‘There is something unique in the idea of the aborigines of the New World being sent for to teach the Egyptians how to pass the Cataracts of the Nile, which has been navigated in some way by them for thousands of years ....’

The passage up the long Nile from the railhead at Wadi Halfa would prove long, exhausting and dangerous. Toronto militiaman Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Charles Denison and his men disembarked from the foot of the Second Cataract on 26 October 1884. They were approximately halfway to Khartoum, with 1300 kilometres, four cataracts and many lesser rapids in their path. They succeeded in transporting the British troops to the upper Nile by January 1885, when they made contact with steamers sent out of Khartoum by Gordon. On 24 January these steamers found that the city had fallen to the Mahdists and Gordon was dead. Wolseley’s expedition arrived 56 hours too late. Subsequently the British returned back down the Nile, ably guided by the Canadian rivermen.



The Nile Valley  
Department of National Defence

Although the military operation failed to relieve the ill-fated garrison at Khartoum, there was no doubting the success of the Canadian contingent. Lieutenant-Colonel Coleridge Grove, the commandant at Gemai and assistant adjutant-general for boat services, recorded that:

*The employment of the voyageurs was a most pronounced success. Without them it is to be doubted whether the boats would have got up at all, and it may, be taken as certain that if they had, they would have been far longer in doing so, and the loss of life would have been much greater than has been the case....*

Brigadier-General F.W. Grenfell, in charge of Nile communications, fully endorsed Grove's view. 'I am of opinion that the Indians were best adapted to working the many rapids. Their skill in handling a boat in bad water was most marked. The expedition could hardly have done without their valuable aid.' Finally, Butler concluded that the best of the voyageurs were:

*... French-Canadians, Iroquois from Lachine, and Swampy Indians and half-breeds from Winnipeg. Could we have obtained a couple of hundred more of this class of real voyageurs, our gain in time would have been very great – so great indeed that the saving of an entire week might easily have been effected in the concentration of the fighting force at the rendezvous at Korti.*

Those boatmen, who actually reached Khartoum, were awarded the KIRBEKAN bar together with THE NILE (1884-85) medal. Sixteen Canadians, including one Sauteaux and two Caughnawagas, lost their lives. Six were drowned in the Nile cataracts, two were killed when they fell from a train in Egypt, and eight died of natural causes. Though their numbers were not huge, the Aboriginal voyageurs in the Nile operation played a significant role. Nor would it be the last time that Aboriginal men were called upon, as part of a Canadian expeditionary force, to support of the Crown far from their traditional homelands.

In 1899, the British found themselves engaged in another colonial conflict in Africa, this time at the southern extremity against the Boer Republics. After some initial defeats to the determined and well-armed Boer fighters, the British Empire began concentrating substantial reinforcements at the Cape, and called upon its dominions for men. Pressure from the Anglo-Canadian community drove Wilfrid Laurier's government to commit voluntary contingents to serve in South Africa. In all, more than 8,000 Canadians enlisted in Canada's first major international expeditionary force. Nearly all of these volunteers were 'amateur' soldiers, given that Canada's tiny regular component, the Permanent Force, was only a few hundred strong. Unfortunately, we will never know the exact number of Aboriginal recruits that served with the Canadian troops in South Africa, as enlistment was on an individual basis and no account was taken of racial origin in enlistment papers. Those who joined did so as

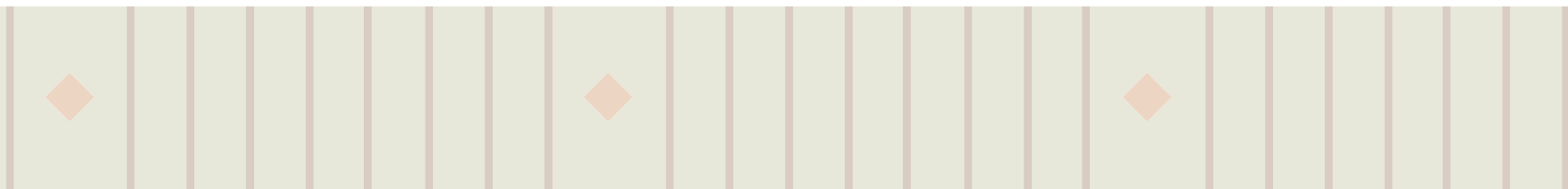


South Africa 1899-1902  
 (Canadian War Museum)

individuals, and some had militia experience. Canadian militia units may have welcomed some because their heritage and upbringing was believed to ideally suit them to such necessary roles as scouts and sharpshooters, though this remains conjecture.

There was at least one effort to include an indigenous unit in the Canadian expeditionary force. As early as 1892, an Ohsweken (Six Nations) company of the 37th Haldimand Battalion of Rifles was mustered. However, efforts to have the militia company transferred *en masse* to one of the Canadian contingents recruited to fight in

*Transforming Relationships, 1815-1902*







Above Left: Portrait of John Ojjatekha Brant-Sero  
*David Boyle, Ontario Archaeological Report, 1898*



Above Right: Sergeant Walter White,  
21st Essex Fusiliers  
*Frederick Neal, The Township of Sandwich Illustrated*

Right: The Canadian South African Memorial  
Association's officially styled granite monument,  
listing Bloody Sunday's fatalities (Feb. 18th, 1900)  
*Canadian South African Memorial Association's Collection  
(NA PA-18142)*

It was during the South African War that Canadian Ab-  
originals, for the first time, made concerted efforts to  
enlist as individual soldiers in the military forces of the  
Canadian Dominion and British Empire. John Brant-Sero  
(above left) a Grand River Mohawk, was refused entry  
into a British unit on grounds, he felt, of racial bias. Private  
Walter White, (Anderdon band of Wyandot) of The Royal  
Canadian Regiment (above right), late colour sergeant  
of the 21st Essex Fusiliers in the Canadian Militia, was  
killed in action in South Africa in 1900. His name is the  
last shown on the monument pictured at right.





**Left: Six Nations Militia in front of the Council House, c. 1880.**

*Warriors, A Resource Guide, the Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre, 1985*



**Right: A Six Nations Regiment**

*The Indian Magazine, Vol. III, No.4, January, 1896*

Although raised as early as 1892, the Oshweken (Six Nations) Company of the 37th Haldimand Rifles (left), Canadian Militia, were unsuccessful in their attempts to have their number transferred for active service overseas during the South African War. Separate attempts in 1896 to raise an entire regiment exclusively from among Grand River Iroquois volunteers had likewise been unsuccessful – despite the eclectic uniform proposed (right).

South Africa were unsuccessful. Perhaps, Indian agent ‘Reports of rumours circulating in the North West that Indians wish to join the Boer force in Transvaal’ caused the government concern that the provision of modern military training and organization to Aborigines, would somehow be utilized against the state itself.

One of the volunteers was Private Walter White of the enfranchised Anderdon band of Wyandot (Hurons), near Sarnia, Ontario. He enlisted in the First Contingent with the 2nd (Special Service) Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, after previous service as a colour sergeant with the 21st Battalion Essex Fusiliers. Like many other South African volunteers, White willingly dropped in rank to enlist. Unfortunately, the nineteen year old was killed in action ‘within twenty yards of the

Boer trenches and much in advance of any other British dead’ during the Battle of Paardeberg on 18 February 1900. At least those who enlisted in Canada were spared the frustration of John Brant-Sero, a Grand River Mohawk who travelled to South Africa and tried to enrol in a British unit:

*I have just returned from South Africa, disappointed in many respects, but I do not wish these lines to be understood as a grievance. I went to that country from Canada hoping that I might enlist in one of the mounted rifles; however, not being a man of European descent, I was refused to do active service in Her Majesty’s cause as did my forefathers in Canada ... I was too genuine a Canadian.*

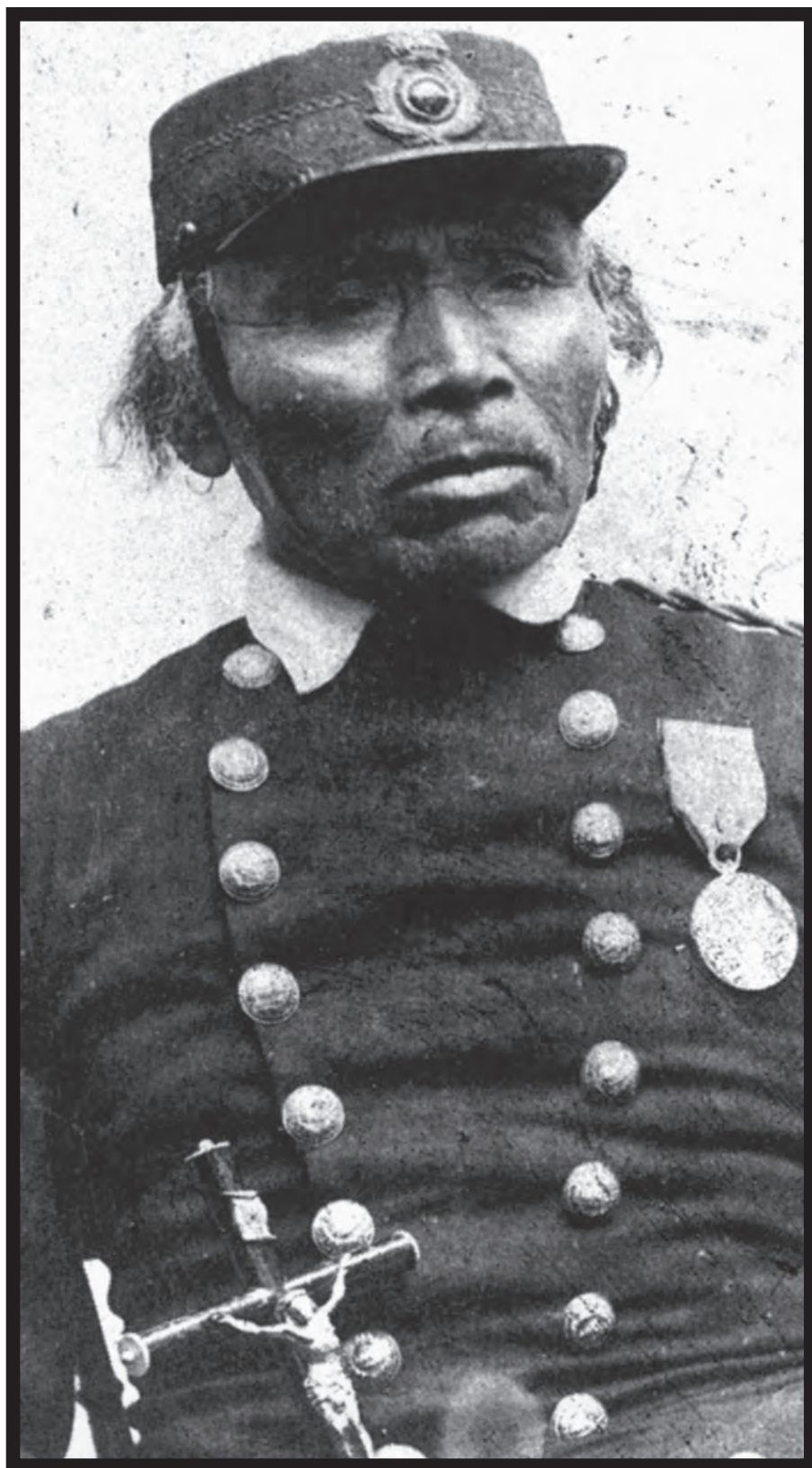
*Transforming Relationships, 1815-1902*

In Canada's next war, although there would initially be some similar feelings in parts of the Dominion, the precedent of enlisting Aboriginal individuals in Canadian regiments was re-established.

By the dawn of the 20th Century, the relationship between the state and Aboriginal peoples in Canada had been fundamentally transformed over the preceding century. Once politically independent peoples were now increasingly constrained within a tight administrative and legislative regime, as legal wards of the Crown.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal peoples had continued to answer the call to arms, against rebels and Fenians close to home, and against enemies of the Crown in far-flung fields of battle. Initially they had done so as warriors fighting in their own national or tribal contingents. As the years progressed, Aboriginal men were increasingly sought as individuals, or for their specialist skills at boat handling, field craft or marksmanship. The forms of service had changed, but traditions of military service remained.





**Chief Lo-Haar of the Comiakén band of Cowichan (1824-1899)**

From the 1840's to the end of the 19th century, from the prairies to the Northwest coast, ad hoc local units of Indian and Métis volunteers, variously styled Home Guards, Native Constabulary or Militia, were raised periodically in response to particular circumstances. These ranged from providing aid to the civil power in apprehending Indian and other fugitives from colonial law, to countering feared Russian, American or Fenian invasions. Pictured here in colonial militia uniform is Chief Lo-Haar (1824-1899) of the Comiakén band of Cowichan. In 1856 he worked closely with civil, military and naval authorities in apprehending individuals sought in attacks against settlers in the Crown colony of Vancouver Island. The motives of individuals and groups who cooperated with colonial authorities against other Aboriginals were complex and varied. These ranged from the desire to act against traditional enemies, to the conviction that the advent of Crown hegemony would be a stabilizing influence on inter-tribal relationships.

*Royal British Columbia Museum photo (PN 5935)*

*Transforming Relationships, 1815-1902*



## Chapter Five



# The World Wars

During the First World War (1914-1919) and Second World War (1939-1945), thousands of Aboriginal men and women voluntarily enlisted in Canada's armed forces. They served in units with other Canadians, and in every theatre in which Canadian forces took part. More than 500 status Indian servicemen lost their lives on foreign battlefields during the world wars, and the number of casualties – including those injured – was much higher. Their notable contributions to the war effort became a source of inspiration and self-confidence to themselves, to their communities and to Canadians in general.

## The First World War (1914-1919)

When Britain declared war in August 1914, the Dominion of Canada – as a colony – was also legally at war. The extent of Canada's commitment, however, remained to be determined and no one could foresee the horrors that lay ahead. The First World War, or the 'Great War' as it was known to its generation, would force nations and empires to mobilize their resources on an unprecedented scale. Canada played its part from the beginning; so too did Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Canadian officials contemplated the role of Aboriginal peoples in the war almost from its onset. The initial response in Ottawa was hesitation. In the popular literature of the day, 'Red Indians' were associated with torture and

scalping, practices quite unacceptable under the rules of war laid out in the *Geneva Convention* (1906). 'While British troops would be proud to be associated with their fellow subjects,' official logic held, 'Germans might refuse to extend to them the privileges of civilized warfare.' The recruitment of 'status Indians' in Canada was therefore prohibited. While these discussions were taking place, however, many enthusiastic and dedicated Aboriginal men had already made their way to recruitment stations and begun their training for overseas service. Obviously, some militia units were either unaware of the prohibition against Indian recruits or simply decided to ignore it.

### An Indian in the Canadian Forestry Corps

By the era of the Great War, military service simultaneously provided the Aboriginal serviceman with the warrior status which was much esteemed in many Native cultures and communities back home; introduced him to the workings of a wage economy which was still unfamiliar to many; and often permitted him to utilize skills with which he was already proficient as a function of his pre-war civilian livelihood, whether in lumbering, river navigation, or hunting, scouting and tracking. The performance of at least some period of military service is still considered a significant rite of passage within many Canadian Aboriginal communities today.

*Library and Archives Canada (PA 5424)*

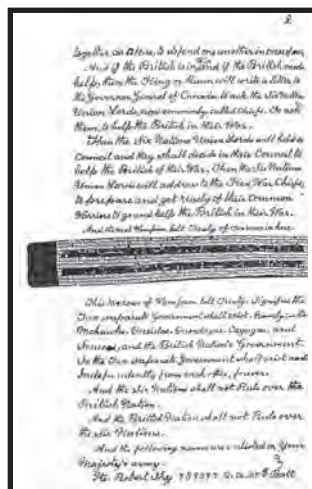




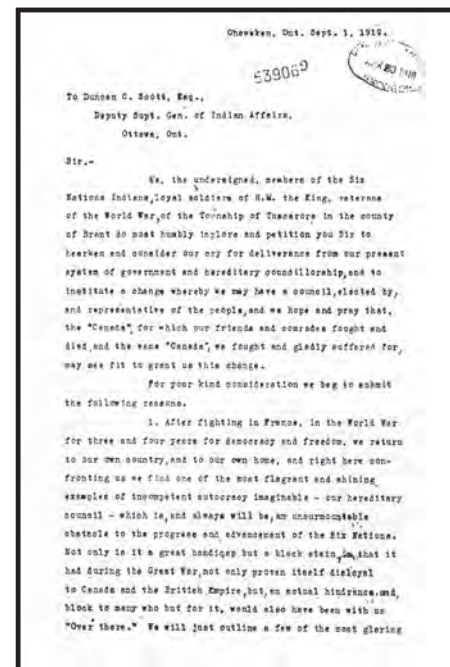
The Western Front , 1914-1918  
 Department of National Defence

Some members of Canadian society did not give substantive weight to the worries of differential treatment and were eager to recruit Indians for service. The role of Indian agents in recruiting and Indian Affairs policies regarding enlistments from reserves fluctuated during the First World War, which reflected the contradictory mandate of the Department of Indian Affairs: it was expected to protect the rights of status Indians as well as to act in the interests of the federal government. Historian James Dempsey has charted the apparent inconsistencies in how government administrators and recruiters applied the rules. In large part, the government's decision to

actively recruit Indians appears to have been a response to Prime Minister Robert Borden's efforts to replace the increasingly high number of casualties in front-line units by 1916. Recruitment efforts, however, did not necessarily bring the desired results. The Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, supported some Indian Councils and local Agents that objected to the tactics used by recruitment officers on their reserves. In one case, when Blackfoot elders requested that 15 enlisted Blackfoot men be discharged from the army, Indian Affairs instructed the military district's commanding officer to release them.



Three Left Above: The Petition of the Six Nations Clanmothers to King George V, 1917  
Library and Archives Canada, RG 10 Indian Affairs, (Volume 6767, File 452-15, Part 1)



Right: The Six Nations Veterans Petition, D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1919

Library and Archives Canada, RG 10 Indian Affairs, (Volume 7930, File 32-32, Part 2)

As would again be the case in 1939-1945, Aboriginal support for Native military involvement during the First World War was by no means universal, and the pressures to participate or not divided communities and families. Many Aboriginal cultures assign significant leadership roles to women, and in 1917 a group of clanmothers from the Six Nations of the Grand River petitioned King George V, invoking the Two-Row and Covenant Chain wampum belts which record the condition of sovereignty association existing between the Crown and the Six Nations Confederacy (three left above). The clanmothers demanded that the King release forthwith from his military service a number of their sons who had enlisted underage. Following the war, newly returned veterans on the same reserve organized politically to help depose the traditional system of hereditary chiefs, which they claimed had not been supportive of them and their families during the war (right).



For the most part, recruitment activities tried to encourage rather than coerce Indians to enlist. Private Canadian citizens also joined in the effort. In various parts of Canada, priests, missionaries and residential schoolteachers encouraged and influenced individuals who were considering voluntary enlistment. In Southern Ontario, one prominent figure offered to fund and back an entire

battalion comprised solely of Six Nations warriors. Neither Ottawa officials nor the local Indian Council of Chiefs accepted the offer, albeit for different reasons. Official government policy still restricted Indian participation and, in this light, Defence officials found the offer 'inconvenient.' The Six Nations Chiefs' response reflected larger political issues. Based on past treaties



**Left: 107th Battalion, "A" Company, Subalterns**

*J. Moses Collection*

**Above: Badge of the 107th Battalion**

*Canadian War Museum*

The fortunes of war; Subalterns of "A" Company, 107th "Timberwolf" Battalion, France, July 29th, 1917 (left). Pictured at front row, sitting at left, is Lieutenant Oliver Martin, a Mohawk from the Grand River Reserve; and back row standing at right, Lieutenant James Moses, a Delaware from the same Reserve. Both were later seconded to the Royal Flying Corps. Martin survived the war as a pilot, stayed active in the Canadian Militia during the interwar years, and was appointed Brigadier during the Second World War. Moses was reported missing, later confirmed killed, on April 1st, 1918 while serving as an air observer. A third Indian junior officer from the 107th, John Randolph Stacey, a Mohawk from Kahnawake, also became a pilot, but was killed in a flying accident in England a week after Moses. Pictured above is the badge worn by members of the 107th "Timberwolf" Battalion.



and alliances, the Six Nations considered themselves to be a separate nation, and thus felt that they were due a formal request from the British Crown, from one nation to another. This gesture would have political and legal ramifications, and was not one that the Canadian government could support. Nevertheless, Iroquois reserves proved active bastions of support for the war effort: the areas around Brantford (Six Nations) and Tyendinaga (Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte) became the highest sources of Indian enlistment in Canada.

In principle, the government did not form 'ethnic' units during the 20th Century. As a result, there were no 'all-Indian' units during the world wars. This makes any systematic analysis and generalizations about Indian contributions difficult. Nevertheless, several regiments boasted large numbers of Aboriginal soldiers. The 114th Battalion, more commonly known as Brock's Rangers, drew extensively from the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Caughnawaga and St. Regis communities in Quebec. Indian officers commanded two 'Indian' companies of the 114th. Like many other battalions it was broken up when it arrived in England and individual soldiers were dispersed amongst other fighting battalions. Another unit with a high proportion of Aboriginal members was the 107th 'Timber Wolf' Battalion, raised in Winnipeg. More than 500 Aboriginal soldiers filled its ranks. It was converted to a pioneer battalion in England, then embarked to France in 1917 and participated in

the battle for Hill 70, just north of Lens. The Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs drew particular attention to the Anishnawbe men who served with the 52nd Battalion:

*Special mention must be made of the Ojibwa bands located in the vicinity of Fort William, which sent more than one hundred men overseas from a total adult male population of two hundred and eighty-two. Upon the introduction of the Military Service Act it was found that there were but two Indians of the first-class left at home on the Nipigon reserve, and but one on the Fort William reserve.... The Indian recruits from this district for the most part enlisted with the 52nd, popularly known as the Bull Moose Battalion. Their commanding officer, the late Colonel Hay, who was killed, stated upon frequent occasions that the Indians were among his very best soldiers. Their gallantry is testified by the fact that the name of every Indian in this unit appeared in the casualty list. The fine appearance of these Indian soldiers was specially commented upon by the press in the various cities through which the battalion passed on its way to the front. One of the Indian members of the 52nd, Private Rod Cameron, won premier honours in a shooting competition among the best marksmen of twelve battalions.*



#### Lance-Corporal John Shiwak

Geographical isolation limited, but did not preclude, Inuit enlistments during the First and Second World Wars, and in Korea. John Shiwak (Sikoak), a Labrador Inuit from Rigolet, served with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. He was killed on Nov. 20, 1917 during fighting at Cambrai. Frederick Freida was another Great War Inuit volunteer from the Labrador coast. During the Second World War, the presence of Inuit along the Labrador coast complicated the efforts of German U-boat crews in landing automated weather stations. Presently across the Canadian north, Inuit members of the Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups of the Canadian Forces reserve are an integral part of our military presence in the Arctic.

*Royal Canadian Legion, Happy Valley, Labrador*

*He rendered valuable service at the front as a scout and sniper and was subsequently killed in action.*

*Private Joseph Delaronde, another Nipigon Indian, of the 52nd Battalion, won the Military Medal for gallantry in action. His cousin, Denis Delaronde, who was killed in action, was the first man of the 52nd to enter the trenches of the enemy. Two other members of this fighting Indian family, Charles and Alexander Delaronde, also served with the 52nd. The latter was wounded, returned home, and discharged, re-enlisted and went back to the front. Another Nipigon Indian of the 52nd to be decorated was Sgt. Leo Bouchard, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Private Augustin Belanger, another Indian member of the 52nd Battalion, who was killed in action, was awarded the Military Medal. Alexander Chief, a Fort William Indian of the 52nd Battalion, returned to Canada after two years' service with no fewer than twelve wounds. Although he was an Indian of remarkably fine physique, he fell a victim to tuberculosis as a result of the hardships he endured and died in December, 1918.*

By war's end, Aboriginal soldiers had served throughout the army. 'Many soldiers of native ancestry shone individually within the various battalions,' historian Fred Gaffen concluded, 'in keeping with their traditional way of life and culture where individual heroism in battle were held in high esteem.'

The Department of Indian Affairs, and in particular Duncan Campbell Scott, trumpeted the wartime achievements of status Indians. His 1919 annual report explained that, according to official records, more than 4,000 Indians had enlisted for service – approximately thirty-five percent of all status Indian males of military age. Given the challenges that faced these recruits, Scott highlighted how remarkable it was 'that the percentage of enlistments among the Indians is fully equal to that among other sections of the community, and indeed far above the average in a number of instances.' Furthermore, these statistics did not include non-status Indians, Métis, or Inuit, so more Aboriginal peoples served in the armed forces than any official record can provide.

In several Aboriginal communities the enlistment record was impressive. Nearly half of eligible Mi'kmaq and Maliseet men in Atlantic Canada enlisted. Every eligible male from the Mi'kmaq reserve near Sydney, Nova Scotia, volunteered. New Brunswick bands sent 62 out of 116 eligible males to the front, and 30 of 64 eligible PEI Indians joined. Although Newfoundland and Labrador

remained a separate colony during the world wars, an estimated fifteen men from Labrador with Inuit ancestry served with The Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the British Army. The statistics from Quebec are somewhat sketchy, but also suggest a high enlistment rate. In Ontario, all but three eligible men from the Algonquin of Golden Lake band enlisted, and approximately 100 Anishnawbe (Ojibwa) men from isolated communities in northern Ontario travelled to Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) to sign up. As stated earlier, the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve provided more soldiers than any other Indian community in the country: approximately 300. In Manitoba, 20 men from the Peguis band saw frontline service – an impressive statistic considering that the total adult male population was only 118. Sadly, eleven never made it home. Similarly, The Pas Band, Sioux Band at Griswold, and St. Peter's Band all sent more than twenty percent of their adult male population overseas. More than half of the eligible adult males on the Cote Reserve in Saskatchewan served overseas. Only 29 Alberta Indians served, but 17 men volunteered from the Blood Reserve. In British Columbia, every male member of the Head of the Lake band between the ages of twenty and thirty-five enlisted. These cases are exemplary by any measure. Men who lived in the Territorial North seldom volunteered because they pursued a subsistence lifestyle and had little information about or connection to international developments, but a few – such as John Campbell, who ventured three thousand miles by trail,



canoe and steamer to enlist in Vancouver – joined the war effort. ‘It must ... be borne in mind,’ D.C. Scott explained at war’s end, ‘that a large part of the Indian population, located in remote and inaccessible locations, were unacquainted with the English language and were, therefore, not in a position to understand the character of the war, its cause or effect.’ This made the high levels of Aboriginal enlistment even more remarkable.

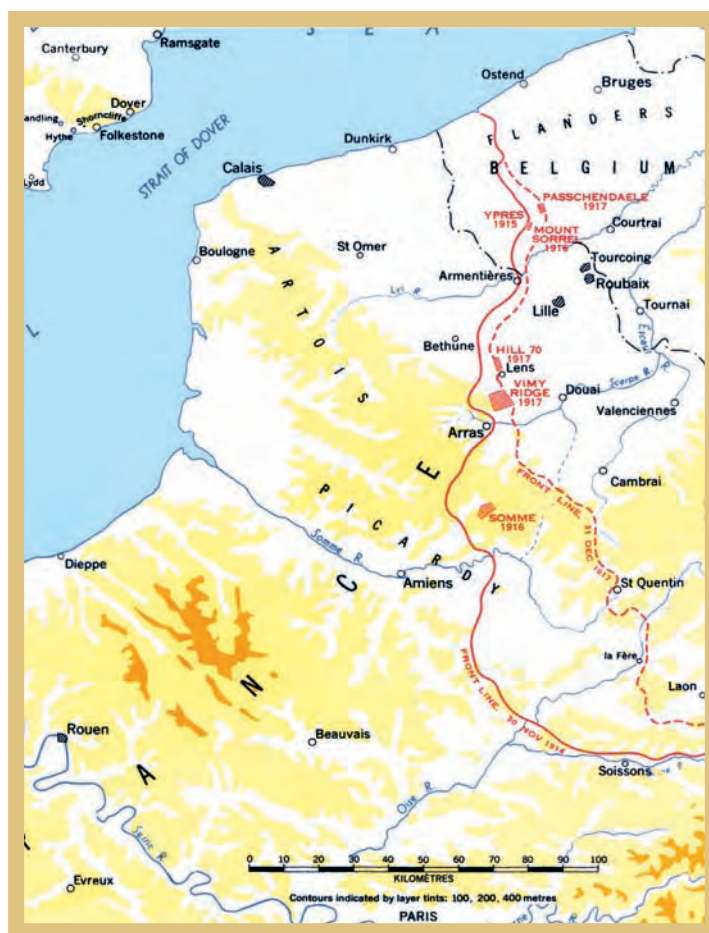
Why did they join? ‘No single answer suffices,’ Janice Summerby has explained. ‘In newspaper interviews, oral histories, biographies, and other published works, Aboriginal veterans – not unlike other war veterans – speak of the call to adventure, the attraction of regular pay, and the desire to follow friends and family into service.’ There were a multitude of reasons, from patriotism to status within their communities. According to one Indian agent, ‘the leading men of a number of west coast tribes have expressed their desire to be allowed to serve the empire at this crisis, and offer to send numbers of their younger men if called upon.’ In Ontario, Chief F.M. Jacobs of Sarnia wrote to D.C. Scott that his people were willing to provide ‘help toward the Mother Country in its present struggle in Europe. The Indian Race as a rule are loyal to England; this loyalty was created by the noblest Queen that ever lived, Queen Victoria.’ Such patriotism was tied to Aboriginal identities and culture. James Dempsey has also suggested that a persistent ‘warrior ethic’ amongst the Prairie Indians motivated young men to join.

For those who served, the experience brought with it a unique brand of culture shock. ‘For Indians who had been raised in the traditional way there were some unique problems of adjusting to army life,’ Gaffen observed. The rigid military hierarchy in the Canadian Corps sharply distinguished between officers and other ranks, whereas traditional relationships between war chiefs and warriors were more equal and familiar. Other systemic differences plagued Aboriginal enlistees during the First World War. Recruits from isolated communities faced language barriers when they went off to train in the larger centres. Some, such as Anishnawbe William Semia from Northern Ontario – who travelled more than 400 kilometres to enlist and found himself in the city for the first time – had the fortune of meeting other Aboriginal recruits with basic training who could assist them. Semia eventually mastered English and fought in the muddy trenches at Passchendaele. A few fortunate individuals found themselves in the 107th Battalion, where Lieutenant-Colonel Glen Campbell spoke the native tongue of several of his men, or in an Alberta unit which had sixteen interpreters – including the commanding officer, who himself spoke Cree, Chipewyan, Dogrib and several dialects of Inuktitut. Another factor working against Native people was health, particularly for those from the more remote parts of the country where they had had little contact with white men and the white man’s diseases. These enlisted soldiers were unusually susceptible to sicknesses such as tuberculosis

and pneumonia, and many of those who enlisted were struck down early in their military careers. This susceptibility was also used as a reason for requesting the de-enlistment of men serving overseas by their elders back home, as in the case of the Blackfoot of Alberta.

Many Aboriginal communities eagerly contributed in whatever ways they could. Their donations to the Patriotic Fund became a source of propaganda; posters promoted the idea that Aboriginal peoples were so generous that non-Aboriginal people had to follow their lead. Reserve communities donated to the Red Cross, fundraised by selling native crafts, and knitted socks and sweaters for those serving overseas. Although Aboriginal people were often poor, government officials such as D.C. Scott proved through statistics how they generously gave to the war effort. The amounts varied greatly, from \$7.35 donated by the Children on John Smith's Reserve to over \$8,000 by the File Hills Agency. Even the smallest donations were heartfelt. The Sioux of Oak River sent their donation of \$101 directly to the King stating 'nobody asked us to do this we are doing this with our free will this is not much but we are doing it with all our hearts.'

Voluntary contributions were one thing; compulsion was another. The most contentious issue facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada during the world wars was conscription, or compulsory military service. While members of



Front lines of the Western Front, 1914-1918

*Department of National Defence*

so many communities had willingly enlisted as volunteers, they did not believe that they should be forced into military service. In 1917, after the spectacular Canadian Corps victory at Vimy Ridge, the federal government faced a severe manpower shortage overseas and decided

that conscription was necessary. When the *Military Service Act* was originally drafted, government officials did not consider the special case of the Indians. Indian communities reacted swiftly, however, and a flood of letters from Indians and Indian agents demanding that status Indians be exempt from conscription caught Indian Affairs unprepared. 'There are no general grounds I know of for relief or exemption of Indians from military service,' D.C. Scott initially claimed, which meant that they would be called up for conscription like everyone else in Canada. Many Indian communities considered this a grave injustice, reminding the government of verbal treaty promises that assured them they would never have to take up arms against their will. Numerous letters noted that status Indians did not have full rights of citizenship: they could not vote, for example, and were legally treated as 'wards' or 'minors.' Given this status, how fair would it be to compel them to serve and assume the same responsibilities as enfranchised people? In the end, this sustained Aboriginal lobbying of the government proved successful. Cabinet passed an order-in-council (P.C. 111) on 17 January 1918 that exempted Indians from the *Military Service Act*. Indians could still be called upon to perform non-combat roles in Canada, but this legislation made it easier for them to claim deferrals for industrial or agricultural work. Status Indians who served overseas during the First World War thus did so as volunteers.

The lore of the war maintains that Aboriginal soldiers particularly distinguished themselves in dangerous but essential infantry roles. Accounts of individual gallantry abound in studies such as Gaffen's *Forgotten Soldiers*, Janice Summerby's *Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields*, and James Dempsey's *Warriors of the King*. Several themes clearly emerge. First and foremost, Aboriginal soldiers were lauded as effective snipers and scouts. Gaffen concluded that in battle 'the skills of the Indian hunter and warrior came to the fore.' Aboriginal soldiers were seen to be adaptable and patient, with keen observation powers, stamina, and courage. Correspondingly, an Aboriginal background and rugged livelihood (acting in concert with longstanding stereotypes attributing extraordinary stealth and cunning to Native people) sometimes placed Aboriginal soldiers in the most hazardous jobs that the army had to offer. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many relished and excelled in these tasks. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa from the Parry Island agency in Ontario, was perhaps the most renowned for his marksmanship. He enlisted in August 1914 and went on to serve at Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, and Amiens. Credited with 378 kills, his record was amongst the most impressive of any Allied sniper on the Western Front. Amongst his many awards for bravery were the Military Medal and two Bars for his services – he was one of only 39 members of the CEF to achieve that distinction. Métis marksman Henry Norwest also



displayed remarkable prowess as a sniper. ‘On one occasion he waited two days for two enemy snipers who had heard his rifle, as he accounted for another of their friends, knowing they were suspicious of his post,’ one of his comrades recalled after the war. ‘At last he caught them off guard and one went down followed by the other in fifteen minutes.’ Lance Corporal Norwest amassed 115 confirmed kills and a Military Medal before falling to an enemy sniper in August 1918. In all, at least 37 Aboriginal infantrymen were decorated for gallantry. Aboriginal soldiers also served in other important roles, and by Armistice Day they could be found in pioneer, forestry, and labour battalions, and amongst the Railway Troops, Veterinary Corps, Service Corps, and the Canadian Engineers.

Formal educational restrictions meant that few Aboriginal soldiers had access to commissions as officers, but many became non-commissioned officers: corporals, lance corporals, and sergeants. These leadership roles built confidence and demonstrated that they were just as capable and intelligent as their non-Aboriginal comrades. A few managed to secure commissions, often by virtue of their performance in the field, including Lieutenants Cameron Brant and Oliver Milton Martin, and Captains Alexander Smith and Charles D. Smith, all from Six Nations, and Hugh John McDonald from the Mackenzie Valley. A small number also served in the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force, including Lieutenant James



#### Henry Norwest gravesite

An Aboriginal serviceman's civilian livelihood, in combination with longstanding stereotypes attributing extraordinary stealth and cunning to Natives, in both World Wars and Korea often had the effect of placing such individuals in the most hazardous jobs the Army had to offer. Henry Norwest, a Cree-Métis saddler, cowboy, trapper and hunter from Alberta, served as a sniper with the 50th Battalion C.E.F. Officially credited with 115 confirmed kills, the highest "score" recorded in the armies of the British Empire to that point, Norwest was killed in action August 18th, 1918 near Amiens.

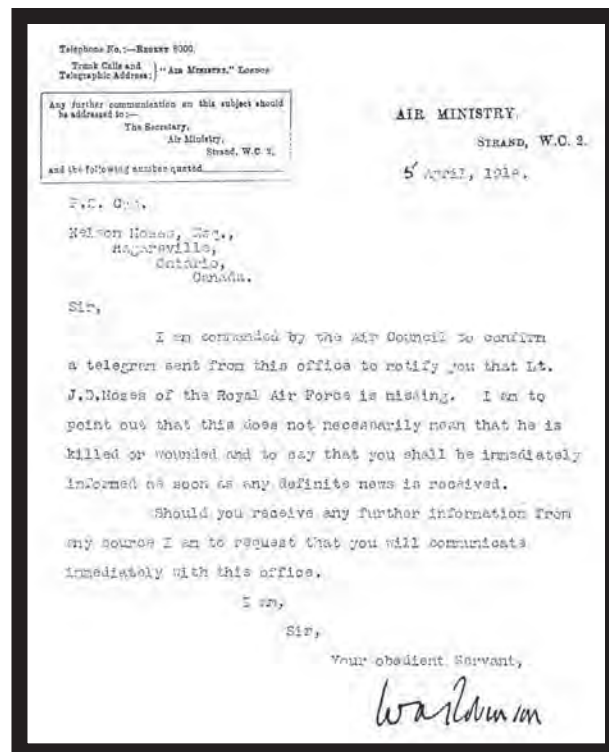
*Glenbow Archives*

David Moses of Oshweken and Lieutenant John Randolph Stacey of Kahnawake. In late March 1918, Moses wrote home:

*My pilot and I have had some very thrilling experiences just lately. We bombed the German troops from a very low height and had the pleasure of shooting hundreds of rounds into dense masses of them with my machine gun. They simply scattered and tumbled in all directions. Needless to say we got it pretty hot and when we got back to the aerodrome found that our machine was pretty well shot up.*

On 1 April, his plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and he lost his life. He was one of 88 volunteers from Six Nations who lost their lives during the conflict.

In all, more than 300 status Indians died in the Great War. Hundreds more were wounded, in body and in mind. Some veterans returned with tuberculosis and other diseases that they had contracted amidst the horrid conditions on the Western Front. When some soldiers returned to isolated communities at the end of the war, they also unwittingly carried with them the deadly influenza that swept the country in 1919. They had made deep sacrifices alongside their comrades from the rest of Canada, and Aboriginal peoples remembered their patriotic contributions to victory. ‘Now that peace has been declared, the Indians of Canada may look with just pride upon the



**Lieutenant J.D. Moses of the Royal Air Force is missing.**

The dreaded telegram. It was subsequently revealed through German Air Force documents that the RAF 57 Squadron DH4 aircraft in which Moses was the observer was shot down by Lt. Hans Joachim Wolff of Jagdgeschwader Freiherr von Richtofen, popularly known as the Flying Circus. Lieutenant Moses was 28, and his pilot, 2nd Lieutenant Douglas Price Trollip (a South African) was 23.

*J. Moses Collection*

part played by them in the Great War, both at home and on the field of battle,’ Edward Ahenakew, a Saskatchewan Cree clergyman proclaimed in 1920:

*Not in vain did our young men die in a strange land; not in vain are our Indian bones mingled with the soil of a foreign land for the first time since the world began; not in vain did the Indian fathers and mothers see their son march away to face what to them were ununderstandable dangers; the unseen tears of Indian mothers in many isolated Indian reserves have watered the seeds from which may spring those desires and efforts and aspirations which will enable us to reach sooner the stage when we will take our place side by side with the white people.*

For this sacrifice, changes were necessary to better the Indian way of life in Canada.

### Interwar Politics

In the Indian Affairs' 1918-1919 Annual Report, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott wrote that:

*In this year of peace, the Indians of Canada may look with just pride upon the part played by them in the Great War both at home and on the field of battle. They have well and nobly upheld the loyal traditions of their gallant ancestors who rendered invaluable service to the British cause in 1776 and in 1812, and have added thereto a heritage of deathless honour, which is an example and an inspiration for their descendants.*



**Portrait photo of Charlotte Edith Anderson Monture, AEF** Demonstrating the Iroquois woman's traditional independence of spirit, Edith Anderson from the Six Nation's of the Grand River reserve was living and working as a registered nurse in New York City when the U.S. entered the First World War in 1917. Joining the American Expeditionary Force as an army nurse, she served overseas in France until demobilized in 1919. She returned home to the reserve to continue nursing, and to raise a family. Aboriginal women on the homefront during both World Wars were heavily involved in charitable work, and with various forms of war relief and soldier's support. During the Second World War, a number of Aboriginal women served in the women's branches of the three services.

*J. Moses collection*





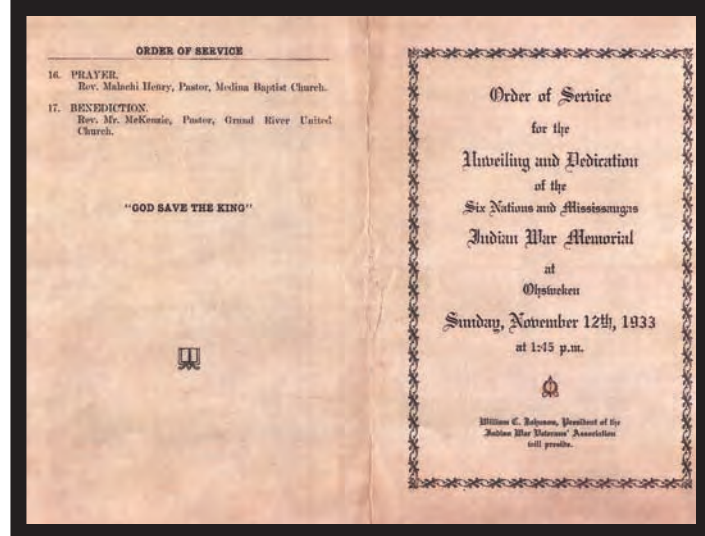
Portrait photo of Lieutenant F.O. Loft

*"As peaceable and law-abiding citizens in the past, and even in the late war, we have performed dutiful service to our King, Country and Empire, and we have the right to claim and demand more justice and fair play as recompense."*

Lieutenant Frederick Ogilvie Loft had served with the Canadian Forestry Corps during the First World War. A Mohawk from the Six Nations of the Grand River, in 1919 he founded the League of Indians of Canada, the first national Native political organization in the country. The League's political activities (which were entirely self-funded) in agitating for Indian rights and political reform soon became an irritant to the federal government. In the Bolshevik scare of the 1920's in Canada, some government officials were concerned that the fledgling Native political organizations were somehow affiliated with communist leagues and militant trade union movements. The 1927 Indian Act amendments attempted to limit Indian political activity. Although never fully successful, these restrictive Indian Act clauses remained in force until 1951.

There was, however, more continuity than change in the administration of Aboriginal peoples after the war. 'In contrast to the country which made political and economic gains,' Gaffen concluded, 'the lot of the Indian people remained much the same. The sacrifice of killed and wounded achieved very little politically, economically or socially for them.' Historian James Dempsey has described the disappointment felt by many Prairie Indian veterans when they returned home. Their exposure to the broader world had changed them profoundly, but they returned to the same patronizing society that they had left. Although eligible for the vote overseas, they lost their democratic rights after the war. Furthermore, the inequitable eligibility requirements and dispensation of veterans' settlement packages (money and land) disadvantaged many Indian veterans. Although they had fought overseas, their legal status had not changed; they continued to be wards of the Crown.

Armed with increased political awareness following their experiences at war, veterans began to organize politically. Fred Loft from Six Nations spearheaded the establishment of the League of Indians of Canada, the first pan-Canadian Indian political movement, in the early 1920s. 'As peaceable and law-abiding citizens in the past, and even in the late war, we have performed dutiful service to our King, Country and Empire,' Loft explained, 'and we have the right to claim and demand more justice and fair play as a recompense.' The treatment of First Nations veterans was amongst the primary



**Above Left: Indian soldiers' war memorial  
Wekwemikong Indian Reserve**

*Canadian Museum of Civilization (# 78927)*

**Above Right: Order of service for the Unveiling and  
Dedication of the Six Nations and Mississaugas Indian  
War Memorial...Sunday, November 12th, 1933.**

*J. Moses collection*

**Right: Notice to trespassers on Indian Reserves  
c. 1922.**

*Canadian Museum of Civilization (# 56862)*

As in towns, villages, hamlets and cities across all parts of Canada, during the interwar years, Aboriginal communities likewise recalled the sacrifices of their fallen members (above left and above right). Despite their recent service overseas, there were few improvements to the lot of Aboriginal peoples in Canada following the War (right). The impacts of the Depression were especially hard upon Native communities. Indian Act amendments introduced in 1920 briefly mandated the compulsory enfranchisement (loss of legal Indian status) of more "advanced" Indians deemed by Indian Affairs to have achieved an acceptable level of self-sufficiency. By definition this category tended to include many newly returned veterans. Earlier Indian Act amendments had for a time stipulated the compulsory enfranchisement of any Indian person in receipt of a university degree.





140. Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, or who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an offence and is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months.

Celebrating  
festivities,  
dances or  
ceremonies  
at which  
persons are  
made or  
bodies  
mutilated.

Penalty.

2. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat.

Exception.

3. Any Indian in the province of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, or British Columbia, or in the Territories who participates in any Indian dance outside the bounds of his own reserve, or who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant without the consent of the Superintendent General [Minister] or his authorized agent, and any person who induces or employs any Indian to take part in such dance, show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant, or induces any Indian to leave his reserve or employs any Indian for such a purpose, whether the dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant has taken place or not, shall on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or to imprisonment for one month, or to both penalty and imprisonment. R.S., c. 81, s. 149; 1914, c. 35, s. 8; 1918, c. 26, s. 7; 1933, c. 42, s. 10.

Restriction,  
Indian  
dances, etc.

Penalty.

140A. Where it is made to appear in open court that any Indian, summoned before such court, by inordinate frequenting of a poolroom either on or off an Indian reserve, misspends or wastes his time or means to the detriment of himself, his family or household, of which he is a member, the police magistrate, stipendiary magistrate, Indian agent, or two justices of the peace holding such court, shall, by writing under his or their hand or hands forbid the owner or person in charge of a poolroom which such Indian is in the habit of frequenting to allow such Indian to enter such poolroom for the space of one year from the date of such notice.

Indian  
wasting  
his time in  
poolroom.

2. Any owner or person in charge of a poolroom who allows an Indian to enter a poolroom in violation of such notice, and any Indian who enters a poolroom where his admission has been so forbidden, shall be liable on summary conviction to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars and costs or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty days. 1930, c. 25, s. 16.

Allowing  
certain  
Indians  
to enter  
poolroom.

141. Every person who, without the consent of the Superintendent General [Minister] expressed in writing, receives obtains, solicits or requests from any Indian any payment or contribution or promise of any payment or contribution for the purpose of raising a fund or providing money for the prosecution of any claim which the tribe or band of Indians to which such Indian belongs, or of which he is a member, has or is represented to have for the recovery of any claim or money for the benefit of the said tribe or band, shall be guilty of an offence and liable upon summary conviction for each such offence to a penalty not exceeding two hundred dollars and not less than fifty dollars or to imprisonment for any term not exceeding two months. 1927, c. 32, s. 6.

Receiving  
money for the  
prosecution  
of a claim.

concerns of Loft and other Aboriginal leaders. Aboriginal soldiers had fought in the war as equals, and even voted for the first time in 1917, but when they returned home they found that they had unequal access to veterans' benefits compared to non-Indians. The *Soldier Settlement Acts* of 1917 and 1919 were the cornerstone of the federal government's attempt to look after Great War veterans, providing access to land and farming implements at a low rate of interest. When status Indian veterans expressed an interest in farming on their own reserves, however, Indian Affairs took over administration of the act from the Department of Soldiers' Civil Reestablishment. Complications regarding ownership of lands both on and off reserves made it nearly impossible for Indian veterans to receive reestablishment loans. Allegations that returned soldiers were being forcibly enfranchised (losing their Indian status), were denied War Veterans' Allowance Act benefits, that the application of the Last Post Fund was inequitable, and also that 85,000 acres of allegedly 'surplus' Indian reserve land were surrendered for non-Aboriginal veteran settlers, further frustrated Aboriginal veterans during the 1920s and 30s.

**The Indian Act, 1938, sections 140-141.**

By the eve of the Second World War, status Indians in Canada had among the most severely limited range of civil, political and legal rights of any group of people anywhere in the Commonwealth. Successive Indian Act amendments in force between 1884 and 1951 (thus spanning the era of the two World Wars and Korea) variously placed restrictions on status Indian travel, the raising of funds in payment of legal advice, and the perpetuation of cultural practices including spiritual observances and the wearing of traditional dress.

Painting by David Rickman [Department of National Defence]



The veterans generated sympathetic attention. During the interwar years (1919-39) ‘no factual account [of the Great War] was complete without a salutary reference to the gallantry of Canada’s “braves at war,”’ historian Jonathan Vance observed. The ties of camaraderie transcended cultural lines. The Royal Canadian Legion acknowledged that Aboriginal veterans were being short-changed, and passed resolutions demanding equal benefits for status Indians. In 1936, government policies were revised to reflect these recommendations. By this point, however, ominous clouds had begun to gather in the Far East and in Europe. When the storm broke soon thereafter, Canada’s Aboriginal peoples again found themselves fighting alongside their comrades to free the world from dictatorial tyranny.

### **The Second World War (1939-1945)**

On 10 September 1939, the Canadian Parliament declared war against Nazi Germany. Hitler’s armies had invaded Poland, and the leaders of the Western world realized that appeasement was no longer a viable strategy. Nazi aggression had to be countered, and Canada could not stand aside in another great war involving Great Britain. Yet Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King was loath to make an unlimited commitment. Canada’s war effort thus began as one of ‘limited liability.’ A modest military force of one division was sent overseas, and the government devoted the bulk of its attention to the British

Commonwealth Air Training Plan and to gearing up for war production. Fearful events soon made this ‘Canada’s War,’ and for six gruelling years Canadians poured their energies into a fight to protect and uphold Western democratic ideals. By war’s end, out of a population of only 11 million people, more than one million Canadian men and women had donned a military uniform.

Despite Aboriginal veterans’ discontent during the interwar years, there remained an undeniable sense of patriotism across Canada when the Second World War broke out. When the German armies swept through Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France in May and June of 1940 the Canadian government dropped its ‘limited liability war effort’ for one of ‘total war.’ Aboriginal peoples, like all other Canadians, were called upon to make sacrifices and contribute to the national crusade to defeat totalitarian aggression. Aboriginal service personnel were among the casualties at Hong Kong and Dieppe, they fought in Italy and Sicily, served on convoy escorts in the Battle of the Atlantic, and flew with bomber and fighter crews around the world. They landed with 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on D-Day, and fought through the campaigns in Normandy and Northwest Europe. The war was a partnership between all Canadians who were willing to sacrifice their lives to restore peace and security to a world in turmoil.



There were many reasons to volunteer for the defence of Canada and Britain. As in the First World War, these reasons were as diverse as the Aboriginal people who participated. Lawrence Martin, an Ojibway with the Red Rock band in northern Ontario, had many family members who served in both world wars. His uncle was killed at Passchendaele, and his father was wounded twice in the First World War. His father said to him 'if you [have] to go to war do not shirk your duty.' He served with the Lake Superior Regiment in Europe. Sidney Gordon, who grew up on the Gordon's Reserve in Saskatchewan, joined the army in April 1941. 'I was single so I thought it was good experience for me to go in the army,' he recalled. He was making little money at the time working as a farm labourer, 'so I figured a dollar and a half a day would be better than what I'm doing. See I get my food, I get my clothes, so therefore I thought of it.' Russell Modest, a member of the Cowichan band who served in the Second World War, recalled that the reason he served was his experience at the Coqualeetza Residential School in Sardis, British Columbia. 'I heard some of the staff mention that the fact that a member of their family or loved ones had been killed in the bombing in London, Scotland and brothers and cousins who were killed in North Africa.' His experiences at residential school prepared him for military life:

*We lined up every morning for whatever, breakfast, lunch, supper, church.... So when I entered*

*the military this was nothing new to me, I just blended right in with it and little easier than some of the white boys who came out of the cities who had no inkling of any discipline in the military, if you will. So I was partly prepared. I left the school at the age of 16 and worked for a couple of years and ... the day I turned 18, instead of going to work ... in the logging industry... I went to the recruiting office and joined up.*

Like others, he joined out of patriotism and a desire to help stop the Germans: he wanted to 'do his bit.' His father was upset. 'He said I know what you've done and it's none of you're business,' Modest explained. 'If the War was on in Canada I would expect you to do what you've done and help the country. But the War's in Europe, it's a European War, it has nothing to do with you, it's none of your business and I don't appreciate what you've done. I said dad it's too late I've given my oath I have to go through with it.' Overseas, Modest served on the front lines with the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment, fighting through the mountains, vineyards, and small towns of Italy.

For some Aboriginal soldiers, military service was an adventure, an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the King and Queen. Chief Walking Eagle from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta encapsulated this sentiment

when he declared, 'every Indian in Canada will fight for King George.' For others, it was the chance to perpetuate a warrior tradition, or represented freedom from stifling conditions on reserves. For a large number of hopeful recruits it represented a welcome relief to unemployment. The depression of the 1930's had devastated many reserve communities, and like other Canadians, Aboriginal men looked to support their families in whatever way they could. The chance to become a soldier meant a good salary and the additional benefit of a dependents allowance. After the declaration of war, there was no shortage of eager men in the enlistment queues.

Early in the war, the Royal Canadian Navy, Canadian Army, and Royal Canadian Air Force were selective in who they chose to enlist. In the Army there were general requirements for good health and minimum standards for education. Across the country many more men volunteered than were accepted, and the racial barriers to Aboriginal participation that were evident during the First World War were still in place. Aboriginal people had, on average, a substantially lower level of education than most other Canadians. This excluded many from enlisting early in the war. The number of cases of tuberculosis and other infectious diseases that ravaged Aboriginal people were in excess of those in non-Aboriginal communities. An Indian Affairs Branch report that listed the incidence of tuberculosis among Indians during the war as 'more than ten times as high as among the white population.' In fact, an assistant superintendent of medical

services noted that it was possible to identify the health of a reserve community based on the number of recruits that enlisted. Additional barriers to Aboriginal enlistment were set up through individual prerogative. In certain areas, despite letters lauding Aboriginal achievements from Ottawa, local recruiting officers were disinclined to take applicants from Aboriginal volunteers. In some instances, these refusals stemmed from the preconceived notion that Aboriginal recruits could not handle the demands of the training program and the confinement of military quarters.

The Royal Canadian Navy was more selective in its recruitment policy than the Army. At the onset of the war, the standing policy held that only a person 'of pure European descent and of the white race' would be admitted for naval service. This policy effectively barred any Aboriginal participation. There were three primary reasons for this discriminatory policy, outlined in a report from the Commanding Officer, Pacific Coast: that confined spaces do not lend themselves to positive racial mixing; that there were legal restrictions on Indian access to liquor (the navy was the only arm of defence that still distributed a grog ration to its enlistees); and that Indians would have to be messed separately. The Canadian government upheld this policy until 12 March 1943, when it was finally changed. The application of this policy, however, was not universal. The 1942-43 Indian Affairs report already listed nine status Indians in the Navy.



The Royal Canadian Air Force had high education standards and also did not accept ethnic applicants. The Royal Canadian Air Force was closely linked to its British counterpart, the Royal Air Force, and it was expected to follow the same codes of behaviour and policies. Prior to the war, the standard was not only ‘pure European descent,’ but also specifically ‘sons of parents both of whom are ... British subjects.’ In 1939, correspondence from the acting Chief of Air Staff indicated that North American Indians were an exception to this rule. Despite this apparent opening, there was far less Aboriginal representation within the air force than in the infantry. To become a pilot, applicants were required to have completed ‘junior matriculation’ – the equivalent to grade 11 or 12. This effectively eliminated most Aboriginal hopefuls: more than seventy-five percent of Aboriginal peoples in Canada attained a level of education equivalent to grade 1 to 3. As a result, the 1942-1943 Indian Affairs Branch report listed only twenty-nine Aboriginal servicemen in the RCAF. Nevertheless, men like David Moses, a Delaware from Ohsweken who had studied agriculture at the University of Guelph before the war, served with the RCAF. He was in Iceland for the last year of the war flying Consolidated Canso ‘flying-boats’ on convoy duty in search of German U-boats.

Regulations aside, Aboriginal people enlisted in high numbers and once again a sense of equality developed in the Canadian forces, inspired in part by shared training and camaraderie. Enlistees – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – spent months training in Canada before deploying to Britain. There, they spent months further preparing for active service. The troops also spent time socializing with Britons. Russell Modeste found the reception for Native people in England to be a refreshing change from the discrimination that he faced in Canada. ‘When we landed in England it was so different,’ he reminisced. ‘We’d go to a dance and anyone you asked, yes they would dance.’ Aboriginal soldiers, free from the constraints of the Indian Act and the watchful eyes of Indian agents, discovered English pubs and lived the life of any other soldier overseas. This experience was formative: it was liberating to some; for others it served to highlight the inequities of Aboriginal life at home. It left lasting impacts, which ranged from growing personal self-confidence, to marriage with British citizens, later called ‘war brides,’ to increased Aboriginal activism in the post-war years.

Aboriginal Peoples’ direct contributions to the war effort through military service grew during the war, as it had during the previous one. In the 1940 Annual Report of the Indian Affairs Branch, Director H.W. McGill observed that:

*Always loyal, [Indian communities] were not slow to come forward with offers of assistance in both men and money. About one hundred Indians had enlisted by the end of the fiscal year and the contributions of the Indians to the Red Cross and other funds amounted to over \$1,300.*

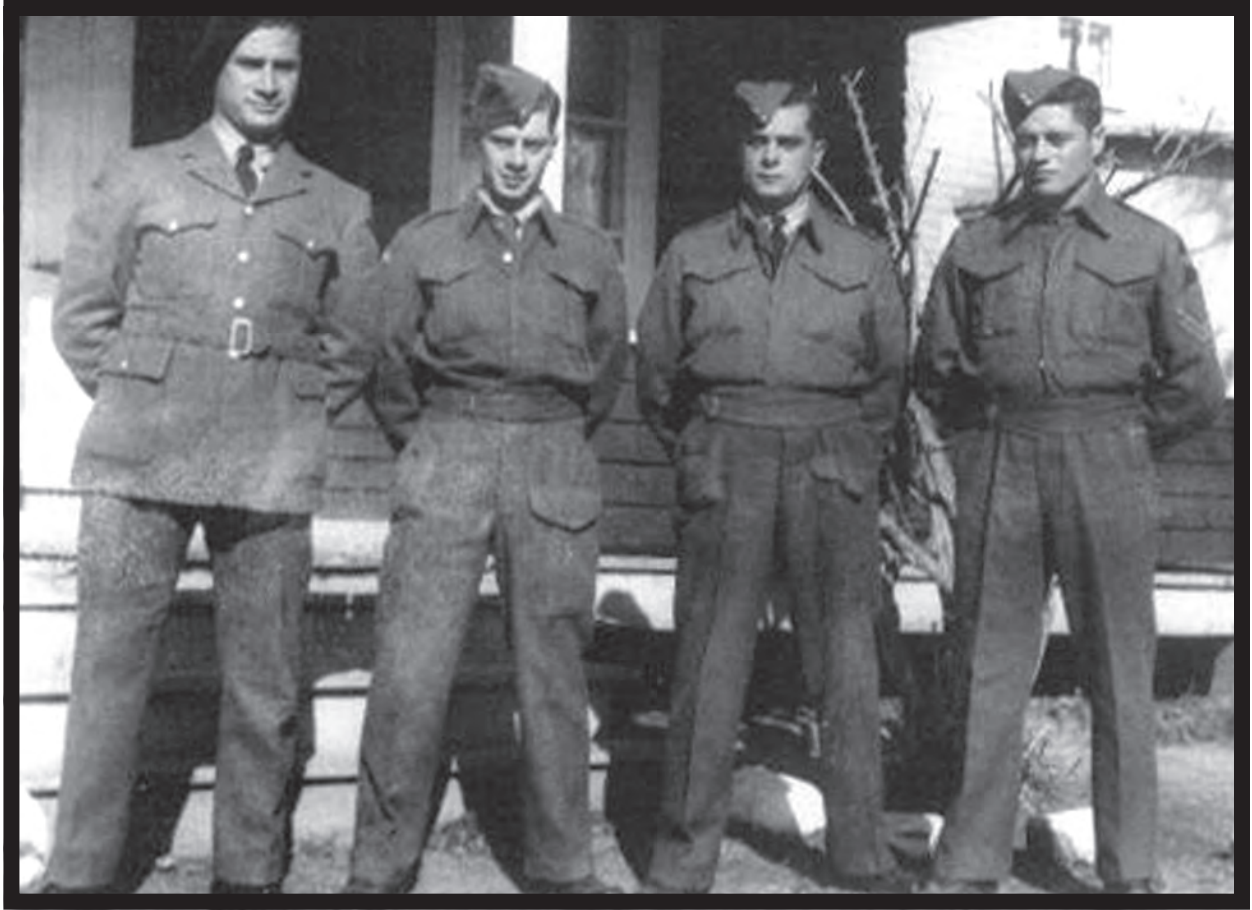
As laudable as this initial participation was, McGill subsequently noted that by 1942 the rate of participation was not as high as it had been during the First World War. Aboriginal men and women were drawn to high paying war industry employment off-reserve. Enlistments were still recorded in all provinces in Canada, and the 1942 Annual Report indicated an increase in enlistees to 1,801. But mid-1943, the number of Indian service personnel grew to 2,383 and then swelled to 2,603 in 1944. At the war's end, the Indian Affairs Branch officially reported that 3,090 status Indians had participated in the war (2.4% of the 125,946 status Indians identified in the Canadian census). As was the case during the First World War, the figure for Aboriginal soldiers was undoubtedly much higher because non-status Indians and Métis were excluded from this count.

**Table 1:**

Province	Total Native Population	Native Enlistment	
Prince Edward Island	266	27	10.2%
New Brunswick	2,047	203	9.9%
Nova Scotia	2,364	117	4.9%
Ontario	32,421	1,324	4.1%
Saskatchewan	14,158	443	3.1%
Quebec	15,182	316	2.1%
British Columbia	25,515	334	1.3%
Manitoba	15,892	175	1.1%
Alberta	12,754	144	1.1%
Yukon	1,531	7	0.0%
Northwest Territories	3,816	0	–
	<b>125,946</b>	<b>3,090</b>	<b>2.4%</b>

*Indian enlistments during the Second World War, by Province. Based on 1945-46 Indian Affairs Branch Annual Report*





**The Lainé brothers from the Huron-Wendat Reserve in Wendake, Quebec.**

Not knowing if she would see her sons alive together again, their mother took the opportunity to take this group photograph (date unknown). From left to right are: Joffre (who served with the American army), Fernand, Robert and Jean-Baptiste. All four brothers survived the war.

*Photo courtesy of Denis Lainé*



Enlistment rates differed by region. The Maritimes boasted the highest per capita rates of participation, with 7.4% of the overall status Indian population enlisting. Ontario had the highest number of Aboriginal recruits, which registered just over 4% of the status Indian population in that province. Slightly more than 2% of Quebec Indians served. Nearly 1.8% of all Prairie Indians enlisted, although Saskatchewan participation rates were significantly higher than those in Alberta or Manitoba. Finally, 1.3% of status Indians living in British Columbia served overseas. The increased demand for British Columbia fishers following the internment of the Japanese Canadians helps to account for this comparatively low rate of participation. The tiny number of enlistments from the Territorial North reflects the relative isolation of their communities, as well as their involvement in other wartime activities such as remote airfield and road construction connected to the Alaska Highway, Northwest and Northeast Staging Routes, and the Canol oil pipeline, which dramatically transformed their homelands.

Aboriginal women also served and noted a spirit of camaraderie that transcended ethnic lines. Dorothy Asquith, a Métis who served in the RCAF Women's Auxiliary, recalled:

*Discrimination? Everybody was so involved in what was happening with the war that nobody*

*was involved in such pettiness. I don't think you bothered to look at the colour of your buddies' skin, especially the guys who were involved in warfare. A couple cousins of mine said, "Who the hell ever stopped to look at colour? We were so all darned glad that you could get a place to duck into; who gave a damn who's with you? We were there together, two lives. That's my feeling; everything was too serious to think petty like that."*

P. Gayle McKenzie and Ginny Belcourt Todd have interviewed and recorded the memories of some of the Aboriginal servicewomen in *Our Women in Uniform*. In their reminiscences, these women indicated that their reasons for joining up were not very different from those commonly cited by Aboriginal men. Several women noted the prospect of earning 65 cents a day (less than the wage paid to male recruits), the opportunity to travel, and patriotism. They were trained in non-traditional jobs, but their primary role was seen as supportive. The RCAF Women's Division motto was 'We serve that men may fly.' In the Canadian Women's Army Corps, Aboriginal women learned first aid, military clerical duties, and motor mechanics. In 1943, 16 of the 1,801 Aboriginal people in military service were women. A 1950 government memorandum indicates that 72 status Indian women served overseas during the world wars.

Aboriginal service also transcended generational lines. Older men not eligible for overseas service enlisted for home defence with the Veteran's Guard. For instance, Joe Dreaver from the Mistawasis Cree Band had earned a Military Medal at Ypres in the Great War; during that conflict he had lost one brother in action and another who later died from his wounds. In the Second World War he joined the Veteran's Guard while three of his sons and two daughters served overseas. The McLeod family from the Cape Croker Reserve, on the Bruce Peninsula in south-western Ontario, also had substantial representation in the military. John McLeod, an Ojibwa, served in the Great War and with the Veteran's Guard of Canada in the Second. Six of his sons and one of his daughters enlisted between 1940 and 1944: two of the boys were killed in action, and two others were wounded. In acknowledgment of her family's sacrifice, Mrs. McLeod was named Silver Cross Mother of the Year in 1972, and she was the first Canadian Indian to lay a wreath on the National War Memorial in Ottawa on behalf of mothers who lost their children to the wars.

The McLeod family was not alone in its sacrifices. In October 1943, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the Cape Croker Reserve – total population of 471 – had 43 men in uniform with the army, navy, and air force; nine members of the Veterans Guard; and seven women with the Canadian Women's Army Corps. These were exceptional numbers. In British Columbia, the interior agencies of

Kamloops, Stuart Lake, Williams Lake, Kootenay and the Okanagan had the highest rates of enlistment. In Alberta, where the overall numbers were much lower than the other provinces, the Blood, Lesser Slave Lake, Saddle Lake and the Blackfoot agencies provided the most recruits. Saskatchewan had higher than average representation for the Prairies; the agencies with the highest enlistments were Carlton, File Hills, Crooked Lake and Duck Lake. In Manitoba, Fisher River, Portage la Prairie and Norway House proved to be solid recruiting grounds. In the well-populated province of Ontario, the Six Nations, Manitoulin Island, Parry Sound and Tyendinaga agencies produced high numbers of volunteers. Most Indian recruits in Quebec came from Restigouche, St. Regis and Lorette agencies. On the East coast the agencies of South West (in New Brunswick) and Kings (in Nova Scotia) contributed the highest numbers of young men and women to service overseas.

After the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, West Coast residents demanded protection from possible attack. In response, the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers were formed in British Columbia. These voluntary 'citizen-soldiers' helped to defend the 'Pacific Province' by patrolling their local area, reporting any findings of a suspicious nature, and adopting guerrilla tactics in the case of enemy invasion. By 1943, 15,000 British Columbians and Yukoners served as Rangers in isolated communities from Dawson to the

Queen Charlotte Islands to the American border. Given the demographic and geographical realities of remote coastal areas, Aboriginal peoples made 'natural' Rangers. 'Indians, with knowledge of trails that are charted imperfectly,' the Vancouver Sun noted on 6 March 1942, were 'given a chance to do heroic work in defense of a province ... impregnable against the yellow menace through intelligent, understanding manning of its contours and natural barriers.' The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers gave Aboriginal men in B.C. a chance to serve in the defence of their communities while continuing their daily employment and traditional activities. They made a vital contribution in several areas, particularly along the extensive – and vulnerable – Pacific coastline, serving as guides and scouts for soldiers on Active Service. The members from Aboriginal communities provided important operational intelligence to the military, reporting unusual activities and phenomena (such as sighting Japanese bomb-carrying balloons) through to war's end in September 1945.

Home front contributions went beyond military service. As had been the case in the First World War, women's service clubs and community groups donated and raised funds for the Red Cross and other war charities. By the end of 1945, Indian bands officially had donated \$23,596.71. A note found in Indian Affairs records indicated that many donations went directly to local organisations and that the 'substantial donations of furs,

clothing and other articles were made, the monetary value of which has not been calculated.' One community in particular received international recognition for supporting the children orphaned by the London air raids. In 1941, the Old Crow Indians in the Yukon sent \$432.30 to buy boots and clothing for these children. The British Press noted their generosity, and the Old Crow community continued to support various war funds in the subsequent years of the conflict.

As Allied fortunes worsened in mid-1940 with the fall of France and the Low Countries, the Canadian government again faced the difficult question of conscription. Late in the First World War, P.C. 111 had excluded status Indians from compulsory overseas services. This legislation was repealed before the Second World War broke out, and therefore the issue had to be dealt with once more. Parliament passed the *National Resources Mobilization Act* (NRMA) on 21 June 1940 to intensify Canada's war effort. The legislation required Canadian men and women to register so that the federal government could rationally manage the country's resources, but it assured Canadians that conscription would be for home defence only. Nevertheless, several Aboriginal leaders and band councils wrote letters and petitions to Ottawa, expressing their concern with compulsory enlistment and service. The issue was not about home defence; most Aboriginal communities were willing to contribute to the war effort. The choice of whether to serve overseas was one of



principle. In Alberta, the Peigan chief and headmen 'expressed the views that the Indians should not be liable for military service,' the Indian agent explained in October 1940, 'on the principles that as they were native born Canadians and at the treaties signed with them [it] was urged upon the Indians to settle down, cease fighting, and live on peaceable terms with the whites.' Several tribal councils in north-western Ontario also passed resolutions denouncing conscription, and demanded that their Indian Agent 'stretch out a long arm and halt all the functions of government.' For their part, the Six Nations at Brantford, Ontario 'strongly protested the imposition of 30 days military training upon the young single men of this reservation.' Initially, groups of men were only conscripted for 30 days of training. As enlistments slowed throughout Canada, these mandatory terms extended to four months service and then for the duration of the war. This reflected Canada's transition from a 'limited liability' war effort to a 'total war' footing.

Government promises and the wording of the NRMA reassured most status Indian men that they would not be sent overseas and many complied with domestic conscription. Several resisted its provisions by refusing to report to medical examinations or evading police attempts to track them down. These evasions became more common after a national plebiscite held on 27 April 1942 released the federal government from its obligation

to limit conscripts to home defence. Bill 80 authorized conscription for overseas service if necessary. First Nations leaders raised issues of fairness. 'Why should we be asked to go?' chiefs from the Blood Reserve in Alberta questioned. They emphasized that, as wards of the government who did not have the right to vote, they should not be asked 'to submit like children and take responsibility with those who are fortunate to be full citizens and subjects of the King.' This injustice would only be corrected if they received the franchise. The government responded that Indians were liable for conscription like other Canadian men. In Quebec, an Aboriginal rights organization known as the 'Protection Committee' maintained that status Indians were exempt from conscripted service, citing their inferior status under the *Indian Act* and their sovereignty under the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The issue led to a confrontation between police and the Aboriginal residents who opposed conscription on the Caughnawaga (Kahnawake) reserve near Montreal. In northern Ontario, Indian reserve communities argued exemptions under the terms of the Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties of 1850. When several objectors, who failed to register, went to court, the Department of Justice explained that 'Indians, being British subjects, are subject to Section 3 of the National War Service Regulations, 1940 (Recruits).' This remained the government's official position for the duration of the war.

In practice, the enforcement of the NRMA proved nearly impossible, particularly in remote areas. The case of Edward Cardinal of Whitecourt, Alberta, typified the problems facing NRMA registrars. When the post office returned a notice ordering Cardinal's medical examination prior to military training, the Edmonton registrar asked the postmaster why it had not been picked up. He replied that Cardinal frequented an area twelve miles north and only picked up his mail twice each year. Other Indians who pursued a trapping, hunting and fishing lifestyle were even more difficult to contact, and the registrar admitted that it was 'practically impossible' to locate many of them. In lower mainland British Columbia, for example, the Native peoples tended to treat the notices 'with apparent indifference,' according to the Vancouver registrar. This made administration very difficult, and therefore the government inconsistently applied the regulations regarding Aboriginal men. Furthermore, language barriers and persistent health problems on many reserves meant that many status Indians who registered were never compelled to serve. As a result, any success in conscripting Aboriginal peoples was limited at best.

By 1943, some of Canada's volunteer soldiers found themselves in sustained operations in Europe. Henry Beaudry from Sheepgrass First Nations was a young man who left his reserve to work for a farmer in the spring



Italy and Sicily 1943-1945  
Department of National Defence

of 1941. In May, he went to the town of Paynton and saw a sign at the Post Office: 'Join the army and see the world.' He decided to do so. 'I went to the post office and just ... signed my name. That same evening I was in a train going to Saskatoon.' After serving with the forestry corps in Scotland, he transferred to Saskatchewan Light Infantry and participated in the Sicilian and Italian Campaigns. 'I was in the front all the way along,' Beaudry recalled, 'and we came to this place called Ortona, one of Hitler's defence line. I was an attack gunner. I had a gun on the top of the hill and the town was kind of on the lower part.' During the battle, Beaudry was hit by sniper fire. When he got out of hospital a month later, he transferred to the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards (a reconnaissance unit) that 'used to go to in front of infantry to ... cut off communications and supply lines.' In one of their more harrowing tasks, they had to cross two canals to take a town. 'They were pretty deep up to our necks you know. We had our guns up. My clothes were past these canals and when we got on the other side we were all ice it was so cold. Our clothes were all icy, we had cross two canals. One of my friends from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, he was a Métis, he got killed right beside me then we kept on going.' Beaudry was again injured in hand-to-hand combat but kept on fighting. Pinned down in a building throughout the night, he faced a continuous stream of German grenades infamously known as 'potato mashers.' 'They used to come around the floor you know by the time

they reach us I used to throw them back to them and they explode,' Beaudry reminisced. He ran out of ammunition by morning, and when the Germans captured the building he played dead. They prodded him awake and he was taken prisoner. Two officers questioned him a few days later. One had been to Saskatchewan a few years earlier and said 'We are honoured to capture a Brave. You guys are the best fighters in the world. You've been fighting for 500 years, [and you're] still fighting. Why do you come and fight? Them guys took all your country.' Beaudry could not reply because he had told his captors that he did not speak English. He spent time in prisoner of war camps in Italy and Germany before participating in a two month long 'death march' in the spring of 1945. When he finally returned to England, he had to spend time in hospital to recover.

The main Allied invasion of Europe came in mid-1944. Raymond Anderson, from Sandy Hook, Manitoba, went overseas in 1943 with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. He parachuted into France just before midnight on 5 June 1944 to set up the drop zone for the remainder of his battalion. 'I was picked for this job and leading patrols because I was a Métis,' Anderson explained, 'and they thought my skills as a Métis, with an Aboriginal background, should be come very valuable.' The following morning, D-Day, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division landed at Juno Beach. Charles Bird recalled:



*Early on the 6th of June ... we got into these ... Landing Craft Assault, now we were going into the real thing now... We were getting close, oh about a mile off the beach when the shells start coming. From the beach now they were shelling but they weren't landing right here where we were in that boat. Then we hit the beach and there was a big pillbox right on the left of us a big in there. The gun was down and we figured we were all coming in on the beach now. When the big door opened at the front then the machine guns started. That was rough.... They bombed the beach before and there was a bomb that kind of hit the ground and five of us got into that hole there. Just got there and there was a wall about ten feet high, we just got to that when a grenade came flying in amongst us. Right in amongst us all you could do was just swing around and turn around so we swung around. That grenade exploded in there. One guy got pretty badly hurt I got in the leg. I got shrapnel in the leg....*

George Myram of Edwin (Long Plain), Manitoba, remembers landing and 'seeing the dead, the wounded and the suffering. I think that was the longest day of my life.... All these bombers coming over bombing, and artillery and the heavy artillery from the battleships just roaring and planes flying all over – some are on fire – and, fireworks. Like fireworks but this was for real, this was for victory.' The liberation of Western Europe had begun.

The Canadian fighting in Normandy and Northwest Europe took its toll: 18,444 casualties in the Normandy Campaign. Canada was given a significant role in the ensuing pursuit of the retreating Germans through Belgium and the Netherlands. Harry Lavallee, a Métis from Stonewall, Manitoba, avoided the fate of several relatives who ended up at Hong Kong with the Winnipeg Grenadiers. He joined the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps, and eventually served in Northwest Europe as a rifleman with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. 'We marched, marched and marched, but the first night going into the front line I nearly got killed [by] bombing,' he remembered. 'We walked to the front line so we had to go there and all of a sudden there were bombs coming all over and we had to dive for the ground and ended up going up into a trench, and that's where I was nearly shot.' He felt the breeze of shrapnel or machine gun bullets as they passed near his body. 'If I'd have went over a foot or something I could have been split in half.' George Myram also fought through Northwest Europe. He explained that 'when there was a war on we knew you were going over there to kill or be killed but we still volunteered.' They fought 'with rifles and bayonets' and 'didn't wait for the heavy guns to soften up the enemy or bombard a position before we went in. We went in, we fought our way in.' By late November, the Canadian Army was deeply engaged in the clearing the Scheldt Estuary. Facing stiff resistance in difficult polder country, Canadian casualty rates quickly outpaced enlistments.

With much consternation, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King decided in November 1944 to send NRMA conscripts overseas. As the first conscripts boarded ships for Europe, the Cabinet War Committee dealt with the unique case of Aboriginal service. In late December 1944, it decided that all Indians were liable for military service; Cabinet did not grant a blanket exemption as it had in the First World War. Indian Affairs could not find any references to conscription in the written texts of the treaties, but they did find cases where ‘exemption *under treaty* could be claimed with justification.’ Verbal promises were made to the Indian signatories of Treaties 3, 6, 8 and 11 that they would not have to fight in future wars. By 1944, at least 324 individuals from these treaty areas had already volunteered to serve overseas. The conscripts from these treaty communities who remained in Canada would only be expected to defend their homes in North America, and would not be compelled to serve overseas.

Officially, all other Aboriginal conscripts in Canada were liable for overseas service, but few if any of the 13,000 Canadian conscripts sent overseas in the Second World War were status Indians. In February 1945, Indian Affairs directed federal registrars not to call up Indians who spoke neither English nor French, not to issue orders to any Native person living in remote areas, and to record any Indian recruit deemed unacceptable to the army, regardless of his physical condition, as

‘Not Acceptable for Medical Reasons.’ This excluded most status Indian men who remained in Canada. Band council opposition and grassroots resistance to conscription continued, however, and tensions ran high. As a result, the government abandoned any concentrated attempt to conscript the status Indian population in the final months of the war. Officials decided to drop any further prosecution of Aboriginal men who had fought the registration process, and granted suspended sentences on all outstanding cases before the courts. Concurrently, Aboriginal volunteers fought on in Europe. Lawrence Martin fought with the Lake Superior Regiment along the Maas River and into Germany. He spent much of his time on half-tracks or clearing houses. “It was a dirty job,” he reminisced. “But somebody had to do it.” Alongside other Canadian and Allied soldiers, they celebrated Victory in Europe on 8 May 1945.

Although the conscription issue generated significant concerns during the war, it cannot be allowed to overshadow the important voluntary contributions made by Aboriginal peoples on individual and communal levels. Most of the 3,000 status Indian recruits served in the infantry. Similar to the structure found in the First World War there were no ethnic specific units formed. However there were many infantry battalions that had significant numbers of Aboriginal personnel, such as the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, The Calgary Highlanders, The Edmonton Regiment, The



**Cecil Ace, Ojibway from Aird Island, Ontario in the Canadian Army, reclining at left somewhere in Germany, the morning after the peace was signed.**

"We went to Caen which we helped to liberate ... We started our push and we moved up to the Falaise Gap ... We fought in the Scheldt Estuary also, a lot of fighting there [against] a pocket of Germans. [We] lost a lot of soldiers there ... We were there quite a while in the Scheldt. We had a hard time there. The weather was so bad ... cold [and] muddy ... We had to dig [the guns] in all the time too. [And there were a lot of German 88s]. And then when we got to [the] other side were in Germany, then we really started to move ... After that the war was just about finished ... We could see big columns of Germans marching back home ... and we were there to watch where they were going ... That was it."

*Photo provided by Cecil Ace*



South Saskatchewan Regiment, The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, The Regina Rifle Regiment and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles. The skills that served them in peacetime were readily adaptable to infantry training. Books by Janice Summerby and Fred Gaffen provide additional biographical sketches of specific individuals and their wartime contributions, including courageous men who earned multiple decorations. Three anecdotes provide an introduction to their noteworthy achievements.

Charles Byce's mother, Louisa Saylor, was a Cree from Moose Factory, Ontario. His father Henry Byce, a non-Aboriginal man from Westmeath, Ontario, had won both the Distinguished Conduct Medal and France's *Médaille militaire* during the Great War. At his urging Charles joined The Lake Superior Regiment during the Second World War. On 21 January 1945, Charles was serving in the Netherlands. An acting-corporal at the time, he led a five-man group across the Maas River to capture German prisoners for intelligence. When the patrol landed it came under attack from three different enemy positions. Corporal Byce personally located two of them and silenced them with grenades. 'As the patrol hurried across the dyke several grenades hurtled through the air towards them. Fortunately, they exploded harmlessly ... but they did serve to reveal the location of two more enemy soldiers.' In response, Byce 'charged the German dug-out and into it hurled a 36 [the type classification] grenade,' killing both the occupants. For his bravery he

was awarded the Military Medal. Six weeks later, Summerby explains, during the battle for the Rhineland's Hochwald Forest, Byce became one of 162 Canadians to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal during the war. His 'C' Company was under severe fire and sustained heavy casualties, including every officer. Acting Sergeant Byce took over the command and 'fought as long as he could; then gathering what few men he was able to find about him he made his way back through the bullet-strewn escape alley.' Byce personally covered the retreat, sniping at the enemy infantry to prevent them from overrunning his men. His citation reads:

*The magnificent courage and fighting spirit displayed by this N[on] C[ommissioned] O[fficer] when faced with almost insuperable odds are beyond all praise. His gallant stand, without adequate weapons and with a bare handful of men against hopeless odds will remain, for all time, an outstanding example to all ranks of the Regiment.*

Charles Byce was one of the few Canadians who won both the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal.

During a long and distinguished military career, Oliver Milton Martin, a Mohawk from the Six Nations of the Grand River, made his mark in both the army and the air force. Martin attained the highest rank ever by an Indian,



**Left: Lieutenant David Greeyes, Cree from Muskeg Lake, Cree Nation, 1st Infantry Division Support Battalion (The Saskatoon Light Infantry), 21 September 1943.**

*Department of National Defence*



**Right: Private Mary Greeyes, Cree from Muskeg Lake, Cree Nation, Canadian Women's Army Corps.**

*Library and Archives Canada (PA-129070)*

Department of National Defence public affairs noted that Greeyes enlisted in 1940 and attained the rank of Sergeant overseas before being returned to Canada in February 1943 for officer training. Returning to Britain as a Lieutenant in July 1943 "he was believed to be the only officer of Indian blood who is serving in the Canadian Army overseas". The image at right was used for recruiting during and after the war. The Winnipeg Tribune caption identified "Councillor Harry Bull, of the Piagut Indian community near Regina who lost a leg at Vimy Ridge in the Great War 'giving his blessing. Stephen Reid recalled later that his mother " the first Indian girl to enlist in Canada...was accepted into the CWAC as a cook and was posted overseas to England in the Laundry Unit". Two other brothers also served.

ending his wartime service as a brigadier. Born in 1893, he joined The Haldimand Rifles as a bugler in 1909. Six years later, he volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force with his two brothers. As a lieutenant he spent seven months in France and Belgium before becoming an observer with the Royal Flying Corps in 1917. The following year he earned his pilot's wings. Between the wars he taught school and commanded The Haldimand Rifles from 1930 until 1939, and at the outbreak of war he was promoted to colonel. The following year he was promoted to brigadier and subsequently commanded the 14th and 16th Infantry Brigades on the West Coast. In October 1944, at the age of 53, Brigadier Martin retired from active service. He eventually became a magistrate and a proud spokesperson for the Aboriginal cause.

Perhaps the best-known Aboriginal soldier of the 20th Century is Thomas George Prince, who distinguished himself in battle in Italy and in France during the Second World War. Prince was born into a large family in Manitoba, and began his military career as a sapper with the Royal Canadian Engineers. He trained with the 1st Canadian Special Service Force and became a paratrooper. The 'Devil's Brigade,' as the Germans came to call the Special Service Force, took Prince to Italy in 1944. On one occasion, he was ordered to maintain surveillance at an abandoned farmhouse approximately 200 metres from the enemy lines. Connected to his battalion by some 1,400 metres of telephone wire, Prince radioed updates

about artillery placements. When the communication line was cut by enemy shelling during his watch, Prince put on civilian clothes and pretended to be a farmer hoeing his field. Slowly making his way down the line he fixed the severed line and continued his reports. He repaired damaged lines a number of times in this manner during his 24-hour posting. With the information he provided, four German positions were destroyed and Prince earned the Military Medal. Six months later, Prince's unit was stationed in Southern France. He and another soldier went behind enemy lines to locate gun sites and an encampment area. They then walked back 70 kilometres to make their report. For this bravery Prince received his recommendation for the Silver Star – an American decoration for gallantry in action. After the fighting was finished, King George VI summoned Prince to London and awarded him the Silver Star and ribbon on behalf of the President of the United States. There were only 59 Canadians awarded the Silver Star, and only three also wore the Military Medal. Prince was in elite company.

All told, the extent of Aboriginal service during the Second World War was impressive. This participation also came at a cost. After the war, the Indian Affairs Branch reported that 200 status Indian soldiers had been killed in action or died in uniform. Historian Fred Gaffen reported the number at 220, and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples extrapolated that about 500 Aboriginal peoples gave their lives, assuming similar





**Above: North American Indian Brotherhood convention, Ottawa, 1945.**

*Kahnawake Cultural Centre*

Following the Second World War, Canada as a nation embarked upon an unprecedented period of economic growth, prosperity and social reform, as the government implemented the features of the modern welfare state. As had been the case following the First World War, newly returned Aboriginal veterans and their supporters were active in promoting the rights and interests of their people through various means. Francis Pegahmagabow was emblematic of those veterans who assumed leadership roles within their respective communities during the interwar and post-war years. Pegahmagabow served as a sniper with the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion during the First World War and was awarded the Military Medal for bravery three times. Treated as an equal by his fellow soldiers, he was disillusioned upon his return to the Reserve where he was treated as a second-class citizen. He would champion aboriginal rights through a peaceful campaign of letter writing and court challenges for the rest of his life. He presided as band Chief from 1921-25 and served as a band councillor from 1933-36. In 1943, he was named Supreme Chief of The Native Independent Government, an early native rights group. Other groups such as the League of Indians of Canada (led by another Great War veteran, F.O. Loft) pushed for the recognition of aboriginal rights. The North American Indian Brotherhood pictured at a convention in Ottawa in 1945 was another of these organizations.



**Right: Francis Pegahmagabow, Anishinabeg of Parry Island, during a 1945 visit to Ottawa.**

*Canadian Museum of Civilization (# 95292-3)*



Victory in Europe, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945

Department of National Defence

percentages for non-status Indians and Métis. Whatever the number, Aboriginal people’s voluntary contributions – and sacrifices – testified to their support for the war and the ideals and values for which it was fought.

Most of the Aboriginal soldiers recalled that they were treated as equals in the military. Charles Bird encountered ‘no such thing as discrimination... Everybody is a brother to you that’s the way it was.’ Howard Anderson of Punnichy, Saskatchewan, explained that ‘it was the coming back that was the hard part. That’s where the problem was. We could never be the same yet we were the same in the Army. When [we came back we] were different.’ When the war was over and Aboriginal service personnel returned home from active duty, they looked forward to starting a new life with the help of the provisions of the Veterans Charter, the generous benefits package set up by the federal government during the Second World War. Unequal access and administrative differences proved a source of dismay for many Aboriginal veterans. In theory, all veterans were eligible for the same dependents’ allowances and veterans’ benefits. The only formal exceptions were special provisions in the Veterans’ Land Act for status Indian veterans who

wished to settle on reserve lands. In practice, systemic factors inhibited Aboriginal veterans' access to information, counselling, and benefits. Indian veterans faced the unique difficulty of having to deal with three federal bureaucracies with overlapping jurisdictions, and they were reliant upon their local Indian agent for accurate details and advice on programmes. Other veterans dealt directly with Veterans Affairs counsellors. These different administrations left ample room for inequity.

For individual veterans, frustration mounted in the years after the war regarding what they saw as unequal and unfair treatment. 'We came from Europe and they give us some money for a while and then we got a grant for \$2,320, the grant was, I think, run by the Indian Agent,' Charles Bird explained. He, and his brother Gerry, used it to buy a tractor and tiller, and started to farm a quarter section in Saskatchewan. But they couldn't sell their produce or livestock without permission. 'If you had cattle you couldn't sell it. You had to get a permit from the agent. You had to have a permit for everything.... Even ...if you took a load of wood to town to sell it you had to have a permit. That was rotten.' Status Indian veterans on reserves did not have access to \$6,000 in

Veterans' Land Act loans – after all, reserve lands were communally owned and veterans did not hold individual title to the land, which meant that their parcels could not be used as collateral. Instead, they received a grant of up to \$2,320. This limited their capital and hence their business options. With energy and determination, some Aboriginal veterans presented their case before Parliamentary committees after the war and formed Aboriginal veterans' associations. Their search for compensation extended into the next century.

Many Aboriginal veterans stressed that they sought one thing above all else: acknowledgement for their contributions. They had participated in the national war efforts from 1914 to 1919 and from 1939 to 1945. They had fought as equals with their comrades-in-arms from all segments of Canadian society. They returned home with a self-awareness that they were not 'second-class' persons, and they sought the same principles of democracy, freedom, and equality for which all Canadians had fought and died. Aboriginal sailors, soldiers and air personnel would continue to serve their country when the 'new world order' envisioned in 1945 failed to bring its promised peace.





## Chapter Six

# The Last Six Decades

Through the last half of the 20th Century and into the new millennium, Aboriginal peoples of Canada have continued to don uniforms and bear arms in support of Canada's domestic and international commitments. This perpetuates a tradition of service begun by their forbearers, in some cases continuing a family tradition that spanned several generations. Aboriginal members of the Canadian Forces continue to represent the country's rich diversity, and make valuable contributions to our peace and security in an uncertain world.

## The Korean Conflict, 1950-1953)

Canada's signature on the United Nations (UN) Charter at the end of the Second World War reaffirmed its commitment to international co-operation and peace. Much hope was vested in the UN's belief that all nations shared a common interest to promote peace and security, economic development, social justice, and fundamental human rights and freedoms. Having fought to defend such values during the world wars, Canadians hoped to create a 'new world order' at home. Now that peace had been achieved, Aboriginal peoples who returned from overseas service carried with them the dreams of a more equitable society that recognized Aboriginal peoples as partners rather than 'wards'. Aboriginal veterans spoke

before Parliamentary hearings to articulate their rights and to highlight the need for mutual respect. Change would prove slow, but their efforts drew necessary attention to the plight of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The early post-war world was a 'time of hope and fear,' diplomat John Holmes explained. Canada's large wartime forces were cut down significantly, but as Soviet-American relations cooled in the late 1940s Canada began to rebuild its armed forces. Few Aboriginal service personnel had served in the Regular services of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Active Militia or the Royal Canadian Air Force prior to the war but some remained on strength

### Robert Carriere, Métis from St. Boniface, Manitoba in the Canadian Army. Pictured here with Lee Enfield (issued) and his U.S. built M2 rapid-fire carbine.

"[I went in] March 25, 1952 to Korea.... I [recently saw] a picture, [in] a book called Blood On The Hills... [of] this guy with two rifles, a carbine and a 303... I said "Jeeze that guy looks familiar. It seems to me I've seen him some place before," [my friend looked at me and] she said "it's you!"... I was in the infantry, and this [photographer asked for] a picture of the guy with the two rifles. I said "what do you want me to do?"... He said "just sit down there anywhere." ... I don't know [how, but I brought my hand to grab my rifle and] bang ....cut myself [and still have] the scar.... Some rifleman I am, killed myself checking my rifle. [Then I sat] down with the carbine [in one hand, rifle in the other].... Snipers were bad, we had our own snipers, too.... I know one time I was in the OP (observation post) and there was a bee or something went by, I guess a sniper must have known our position and he shot ... maybe 3-6 feet over our head, but you could hear the bullets going by...."

Department of National Defence photo





The Korean Theatre  
 Department of National Defence



or rejoined as the Cold War set in. They would be called upon to serve in the Far East when fears of communist aggression proved to be well founded.

The North Korean Communist invasion of South Korea on 25 June 1950 represented a major test of the UNs' collective security provisions and highlighted that the Cold War would not be without bloodshed. The UN managed to pass a resolution to support South Korea's defence efforts, and the Americans soon committed massive military resources to the conflict. Canada and many other allied countries contributed to the multi-national force assembled to support the principle of collective security. Although technically called a UN 'police action', the Korean Conflict, officially called 'United Nations Operations – Korea, 1950-1953,' led to a reordering of national social and economic life in Canada.

The first Canadians to serve in the Korean theatre were members of the Royal Canadian Navy. Three tribal-class destroyers sailed for the Far Eastern theatre in July 1950: His Majesty's Canadian Ships (HMCS) *Cayuga*, *Athabaskan*, and *Sioux*. Later in the war, HMC Ships *Nootka*, *Iroquois*, *Huron* and *Haida* followed them. These names all bore the names of Indian tribes, and Aboriginal sailors were amongst the naval personnel on their decks. Chief Petty Officer, 2nd Class George Edward Jamieson, a member of the Six Nations Upper Cayuga Band, was likely the highest-ranking Indian in the Royal Canadian

Navy during the Korean Conflict. A Second World War veteran who had escorted convoys during the Battle of the Atlantic, Jamieson remained in the peacetime navy and was serving aboard HMCS *Iroquois* as chief torpedo anti-submarine instructor when that ship was assigned to Korean waters in 1952. Three years later, he was promoted to Chief Petty Officer, 1st Class, the Navy's most senior non-commissioned rank. Russ Moses, also from Six Nations, was aboard the *Iroquois* when it sustained 13 casualties during a firefight with a North Korean coastal battery on 2 October 1952. 'I was glad to get out of there,' he recalled. In all, he served five years with the Royal Canadian Navy and ten more with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Ronald Lowry, a Mohawk from the Bay of Quinte, joined the navy in 1949. 'My friend wanted to join the RCN to learn a trade,' Lowry later reflected. 'I was a two-year plumber's apprentice in Oshawa [Ontario] and I went with him for company.... When we got there, I was asked if I wanted to try the tests. I was told it would be about a two-hour wait, so I tried them.... I passed and it just evolved from there.' In August 1951 Lowry was assigned to HMCS *Nootka*, back from her first Korean tour, and six months later he was aboard when she sailed for a second tour in Far Eastern waters. Lowry was a sonar technician, but he also received demolition training. For six months he worked with South Korean and British marines in commando-style raids on North



Left: Frank Michon, Métis from Fort William Reserve, Ontario in the navy, army and air force (1961-1971) . Pictured here in his Royal Canadian Navy uniform.



Right: Frank Michon pictured seated with Sergeant Ernest "Smokey" Smith V.C.

*"My grandfather went into the Navy and I joined the sea cadets when I was twelve... I had an uncle on the Scottish side who had been in the Royal Navy and who served in the RCN so I wanted to be a sailor. My native grandfather, he was all for the Army – you could dig a hole and hide yourself... My Scottish grandfather had also served in the First World War and all he said was 'mud, mud, mud and bully beef – at least in the Navy you will have a nice warm bed at night lad. If you get sunk it will be quick. I kind of liked his way of thinking so, yes I wanted to be a sailor."*

*Photos provided by Frank Michon*

Korea, blowing up bridges, railways and other strategic targets. Lowry remained in the navy after the war, attaining the rank of petty officer, and he spent three of his ten years of service attached to the Royal Navy's submarine service. His was a naval family: his wife, Joan, a Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia, also joined the Royal Canadian Navy during the early 1950s and four of their five sons have since served in the navy.

Canada's contribution grew in August 1950, when Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent responded to public pressures and announced that Canada would commit ground forces to Korea in support of UN obligations. The Canadian Army Special Force (CASF) was organised, recruited in a rush, and the first unit arrived overseas before the year was out. This infantry brigade numbered roughly five thousand, and was built around a cadre of Second

World War veterans. It is unknown how many Aboriginal soldiers fought in Korea, but the Indian Affairs Branch reported the names of 73 status Indians who enlisted for service in the first year. In 1952, it reported that 175 Indians had joined the CASF. This number was never updated, but estimates suggest 'several hundred Natives served on the battlefields and also at sea in an area that had been known, in more peaceful times, as the Land of the Morning Calm.' In all, Canada sent more than 20,000 personnel to the UN forces in Korea – a small number compared to the world wars, but still a significant force. Amongst these personnel were several hundred First Nations and Métis service personnel who had either served in the Second World War or saw service as a means to broaden their life experience and improve their economic circumstances.

Sergeant Tommy Prince, the much-decorated veteran of the Second World War, re-enlisted with the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry to serve in Korea. There he earned another three campaign medals, bringing his total to 11 in all – the most ever held by a Canadian Indian. His previous service provided him with important experience, but had also taken its toll physically: at 35 he was developing arthritis in his knees, made all the more painful because of cartilage damage from his days as a paratrooper. Patrolling in the rugged Korean hills caused him great discomfort, and he was assigned, against his objections, to less arduous



#### **Prince on field exercises at Camp Borden**

The outbreak of the Korean Conflict saw the return to war service of dozens of Aboriginal veterans of the Second World War, as part of the newly raised Canadian Army Special Force. Pictured here at Camp Borden circa 1953, Sgt Thomas Prince had earned the Military Medal and United States Silver Star while serving with the joint Canadian-American Special Service Force during the Second World War. He served again with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry regiment in Korea. The 2001 purchase of his war medals at auction for \$75,000 and their eventual return to his home province of Manitoba were widely reported in the media.

*Photo from Manitobans in Profile: Thomas George Prince by D. Bruce Sealey and Peter Van de Vyvere, 1981*



duties before being posted to an administrative position at Camp Borden, Ontario. Ever the warrior, Prince felt that his knees had improved sufficiently to apply for a second tour of duty with the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. His application was approved, and he returned to the battlefield one last time. By the time the war ended, Prince walked with a noticeable limp and was discharged from the army in 1954 with a disability pension. He died in 1977 at the age of 62.

Stephen Simon, a Mi'kmaq from Big Cove, New Brunswick, reached the front lines in Korea with the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, in the fall of 1951. As an infantry radio operator, he experienced some dangerous situations. In June 1952, he was in a bunker in front of Hill 133 where officers came to observe the enemy position. One of the field medical officers did not pay heed to warnings to keep his head down. 'I think it was the third time he popped his head out,' Simon recalled, 'the shell ... blew his head off. Things like that happened and ... the rest of us continue fighting until the day we die.' Thankfully, Simon did not become a casualty of war. His status as a registered Indian, however, could have. While overseas, he received a letter from his Indian agent advising him to give up his Indian status and enfranchise as a Canadian citizen:

*I didn't know what to do; there was not other Indian people around to turn to for advice. I thought of my commanding officer. I said to myself, being an army man he wouldn't know anything about Indians himself, but anyway I had to look for some kind of advice and so I got an interview with him. I asked him what he would do. He looked at my form and he looked [at] me for a while. "You asked me for advice, this is what I want to do, so he took the form and tore it up in shreds and threw it in his waste basket, and said, "I advise you do not sell your status. Do not let anyone steal or take your status – maintain your status, this is my advice, you can always get another form if you wish to go ahead with this." I always remembered that. I never did get another form and I never did sell my status.*

The Métis community was also well represented in Korea. Poor economic prospects and poverty encouraged some to enlist in the Special Force. Maurice Blondeau had been trained as a motor mechanic, but when he could not find work, he 'hitchhiked from Fort Qu'Appelle to Regina at six o'clock in the morning in 36-below weather to join the army.' With a grade nine education, Blondeau ended up in the artillery. Although he was wounded by



Russ Piché, Métis from Vankleek Hill, Ontario, in the Canadian Army. Here with the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, destroying enemy bunker-tunnel and ammunition supply in no man's land, Korea. Piché is pictured fourth from left.

"My job in Pioneers was laying out mine fields and barb wire in front of the lines. And part of the Pioneer's job is to escort patrols going in and out through the minefields. Also finding and destroying any enemy bunkers and ammunition that could be found which we did a bit of.... On occasion you would find enemy bunkers or enemy little-crawl tunnels and one of the jobs that we did was to go in and find out if there was any ammunition or anything in the tunnel so it could be destroyed so it couldn't be used against you at a later date. And of course destroy the tunnel."

*Photo provided by Russ Piché*

shrapnel that severely damaged his ankle ligaments in Korea, he nevertheless stayed in the army until 1957, and he eventually became executive director of the Saskatchewan Indian and Native Friendship Centre. Wes Whitford also joined the army in 1950 because 'jobs were hard to get.' He also continued a proud family tradition of service:

*I had nine uncles in WWII and that's what I wanted to be like. They were telling all these stories about what a good time they had in England and Holland stuff like that so I wanted to be part of it but I was too young at the time. Then with the Korean War started I thought well this was my chance to see some country and get some experience and of course medals. I wanted medals.*

Although his uncles later teased him that Korea 'wasn't really a war,' he replied to them 'the bullets were and any way people were getting killed.... I was proud, very proud. Still am.'

At 16 years of age, Ron J. Camponi forged his birth certificate and joined the Army in 1942. He was discharged when authorities discovered his age, but he re-enlisted as a boy soldier and served in Canada until the spring of 1946. Eight months later he re-enlisted, this time in the Regular Force, with the 2nd Armoured Regiment,

Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians). In 1952 he went to Korea with 'B' Squadron of the regiment. He recounted:

*Korea was something like the First World War. Everyone was dug in at the 38th Parallel and it was like the WWI trenches.... There was a lot of shelling and a lot of patrols. The infantry went on patrols, and we were dug in, in our tanks, as support. The shelling was really hard on the nerves, because we couldn't go anywhere; we couldn't move our tanks. We would register targets during the day and we would fire at night with the instruments, laying the shells on the targets.... It was a bloody war; people shooting at you and shelling you and people being killed.*

On 13 August 1952, Chinese mortars hit 'B' Squadron tanks on Hill 159 and knocked out one of the turrets. Under fire, Sergeant Camponi took out a replacement and brought back the damaged tank. His brothers also served: in August 1952, the front cover of *The Legionary* (the official magazine of the Royal Canadian Legion) featured a photograph of three Camponi brothers atop a tank in Korea.

Differences in culture and language made it especially difficult for northern Aboriginal peoples to join the armed forces. Nevertheless, the 1952 Indian Affairs annual



report listed that ‘a number of young Indians’ from the Northwest Territories had enlisted for active service, ‘including a fine representative group from the Hare Bands of the Loucheux Indians. Early reports received on this group of young men indicate that the majority are doing well in their new vocation.’ One Inuk who enlisted was Eddie Weetaltuk, born near East Main River, Quebec, and raised at residential schools in northern Quebec and Ontario. After working as a cook and labourer in pulp and paper factories around Timmins, Ontario, and in various lumber camps in the upper

Ottawa Valley, he joined the Canadian Army Special Force in 1952 under the name of Eddie Vital. He saw action with the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry in Korea, and upon his return to Canada took parachute and arctic warfare training with the Mobile Striking Force: the Regular Army cadre responsible for the defence of Canada. He subsequently served two tours of duty in West Germany before leaving the military to return to Poste-de-la-Baleine (Great Whale River) on James Bay.



**Left: Privates John Wheeler, Father and Son**

*“The Legionary” magazine, April, 1952, page 34*



**Right: Brother Trio in Korea**

*“The Legionary” magazine, August, 1952, cover and page 3*

From the 1950's onward, new generations of Aboriginal Canadians found themselves donning uniforms and bearing arms in support of Canada's commitment to the United Nations charter and in fulfillment of our partnership in NATO. Aboriginal participation in the Canadian military during the 20th century had become a family affair in many instances. Pictured at left are the father and son team of John Wheeler, Sr., and John Wheeler, Jr. of the PPCLI, two Métis infantryman from western Canada who served together in Korea. Pictured at right are the three Camponi brothers, also Métis from western Canada: Ron, Tony and Len. They served in Korea as armoured crewmen with the Lord Strathcona's Horse.

‘It’s not easy, when a soldier goes to war and comes back, the war does not end there,’ Stephen Simon explained. ‘Like the Korean War, they say it was over in 1953, but [for] most of us, it doesn’t end there, it ... stays with us ... the rest of our lives.’ That is why Simon always participates in Remembrance Day: ‘We show our gratefulness to all the veterans, in general, that had fought and sacrificed their lives in the dark days of war.’

### The Cold War

The Korean War ended in 1953, but the Cold War remained. Indeed, the fear of a more severe superpower conflict in Europe loomed large in the minds of all who lived at that time. Canada, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (founded in 1949), agreed to provide a brigade group of infantry and an air wing for continuous service in Europe. New battalions were formed as the Canadian armed forces underwent unprecedented peacetime expansion.

Mary Wuttunee, a member of the Red Pheasant Band of Saskatchewan, joined the air force in the mid-1950s at the age of 21. ‘My mother didn’t like it,’ Wuttunee recalled. ‘She didn’t think it was a place for women.’ But both of Mary’s brothers had been in the army, and she had one younger sister who joined the air force and another in the navy. ‘It must have been the warrior instinct in us,’ she suggested. Nevertheless, actual service was ‘definitely a cultural shock’:

*We went to a place where we had never been, people didn’t speak English in Montreal. So when you asked them something they didn’t know what you were talking about. So I hated Montreal but the fact that you were on parade getting yelled at by some little NCO [non-commissioned officer] because you didn’t know how to march, and my sister didn’t know how to march nor my aunt. So they were always threatening that they were going to tie them two with a rope to keep them up with everybody else. We were not used to being yelled at, especially by men, maybe our mother but not by our father. He just never yelled at us, he didn’t believe in yelling. Then all of a sudden you go to St. Jean, Québec, and you get on a parade square and everybody is yelling. And that was a shock. I disliked it so much that after three weeks I wrote a resignation letter and I passed it to the phys-ed teacher who was a corporal. I said to him I want to show you something; can you help me with it. He said “sure.” So I gave me him my letter of resignation and he rolled around all over the floor laughing. And every time he looked at me he just laughed and I watched him and when he finished laughing I said, “what’s so funny”. He said “Mary you can’t resign.” I said, “What do you mean I can’t resign? I just did there is my letter to prove it.” I didn’t realize I couldn’t resign. I was in there.*





Irene Hoff, Abenaki from Odanak, Quebec in the St. John Ambulance and the Canadian Army. Seated second row to the left of Lieutenant-Governor Paul Comptois the day she was presented to him c. 1962.

"When I got into the army... when I got my commission,... I was working... in Indian Affairs... I was still going to business college... Colonel Patrick... the colonel of the Governor General's Foot Guards... asked me if I would like to join the CWAC... I said sure... This was all women, you see they opened it up in '51, so that they could employ females ... in the armoured corps... I always worked in the Orderly Room, which was all administrative work, and I used to go around to 30th Field Regiment [and report] all their files for them.... I was well trained. I was a sergeant-major. I knew my business... When I started off... in '51, ... I started out as a Private. And I earned all my ranks, all the way up, until I became sergeant-major. ... And that would be just before I got my commission. Second lieutenant and lieutenant the same day... I looked after anything administrative... Sometimes I had to work until four in the morning... You had about 400 people in camp... and everything has to be done... While I was in it, I enjoyed it. But I was glad to get out. I used to spend a lot of spare time down there. When I didn't have to, because there was so much work involved."

Photo provided by Irene Hoff





**Warrant Officer Ernest Nadjiwan, Ojibway from Cape Croker, Ontario, RCAF (1951-1986)**

"We moved to Cape Croker [when I was young] did some farming until the Second World war broke out. My father was wounded in Italy.... We had five [from the reserve] that were killed... in the Second World War. Eight from the First World War.... we had a history of military service in our community and everyone here is very proud of that.... I wanted to follow in my family's footsteps; I guess that was the main reason [I joined in November 1951] and I wanted to see the country, which I did. [I preferred the Air Force] I thought that was the best. I didn't feel like marching around with the infantry or joining the navy.... [My experience in the military helped me to] organize and discipline myself, when I finished the service I was a councillor here on the reservation for several years and I was chairman of our education trustees."

*Photo courtesy of Ernest Nadjiwan*

Wuttunee served with the air force at Cold Lake for three years analyzing flight runs of missiles and fighter jets, and then worked there as a civilian with Computing Devices of Canada (CDC) until 1960. 'I think it gave me a very positive attitude because no one ever said "Mary you can't work on the computer because ...," she later reflected, "When you got into the armed forces; into the air force base ... you were just a person the same as everyone else and that was different. People accepted you for who you were".'

Military statistics compiled during the Cold War did not differentiate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members, and therefore no reliable number of Aboriginal service personnel can be offered for this era. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Aboriginal peoples continued to volunteer to serve their country as they had during the world wars. Infantry units like The Algonquin Regiment, The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, and The Regina Rifle Regiment, which recruited from rural areas with a sizeable Aboriginal population, reflected this participation. The *Indian News*, a monthly Indian Affairs publication produced from the mid-1960s to the early 70s, highlighted Aboriginal involvement in various aspects of Canada's national life, including military service. It often included brief profiles of men and women such as Leading Aircraftman K.N.B. Bannab, a photo-technician with the Royal Canadian Air Force's 1 Wing at Marville, France; Sergeant John Martin from the Six Nations, of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, who was serving with his battalion in Cyprus in April

1967 as drum major; Leading Aircraftwoman Geraldine Restoule, an Ojibwa from the Dokis Reserve in northern Ontario; and Sergeant Ernie Simpson (Okanagan, from Vinfield, British Columbia) with The Corps of Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and Private Dolphus L'Hirondelle (Cree from Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta), with the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, who were both serving with 13 Transport Company in Edmonton, Alberta.

Again, the breadth of experience defies easy generalization. Harvey Horlock of Toronto, who traces his family's long history of military participation back to the War of 1812, joined The Toronto Scottish Regiment in September 1952. 'The Korean War had come along and naturally everybody wanted to be army,' he explained. 'And having most of my uncles serving in army it kind of drew me like a magnet.' As a reservist, he took various Cold War training courses, including 'atomic, chemical and biological warfare' and 'knots and lashes.' The former dealt with protecting infrastructure like water works from biological attack, and the latter trained reservists with crowd control and rescue operations if people needed to be evacuated from cities or towns in the case of an atomic attack. Thankfully there was no nuclear catastrophe, but Hurricane Hazel ravaged southern Ontario in 1954 and his regiment was called out to assist the civilian authorities in looking for bodies and survivors. Joe Meconse, who was born on his father's trapline near Churchill, Manitoba, joined the militia in 1960 and two years later volunteered for the regular force. He served

in a domestic 'aid to the civil power' capacity during the October Crisis of 1970. 'It was quite unfortunate... one of the saddest parts of my army career,' Meconse explained, 'to carry a loaded weapon in my own country, against my own people, but it had to be done.'

Other Aboriginal servicemen and women served overseas. Ernest Nadjiwan 'wanted to follow my family's footsteps' when he joined the military in 1951, and in 1963 he served in Yemen, a 'terrible place to go' in his eyes because it was dominated by the 'three Fs in that country – flies, filth and famine.' Joe Meconse served on UN duties in Cyprus from September 1964 to March 1965. 'I was doing outposts, ... making sure that the Cypriots and the Greeks [stayed] on their side, and the Turks on their side,' he explained. 'We're the middleman. That was our main function to keep them separated, keep the peace.' Bob Ducharme of Nanaimo, British Columbia, also served in Cyprus and recalled the good relations that he enjoyed with the locals:

*Well, I had several friends there ... I had a favourite place in the valley where I'd go, and there was a farmer in there, so he used to bring me a coffee, and after a couple of mornings like that, then I'd leave my jeep parked at the side of the road, so the drivers could see it, and I'd go in and help him in the field, you know, cut grain and all that .... It was good. I enjoyed that. Just for a couple of hours, 'til the sun came up and it got too hot!*



Cliff Bolton, Tsimsian from Port Essington British Columbia. Seen here seated front row, second from right. Army Cadet with the Bisley Team, 1959.

“We went to England, to Bisley, in 1959. I was the captain of the Canadian rifle team...the Army cadets from across Canada...We came second, by one point the English beat us...and that was shooting against the whole British Commonwealth...I didn't really learn how to fire a rifle, or a shotgun. When I was at the Residential School, that was the first time ever I really fired a rifle, so much, and I learned how to handle it properly and to be safe, and then I learned how to instruct the younger ones that came along behind us...With all the things that happened at Residential Schools now, there's some pretty bad things that happened...I just happened to be a lucky person that experienced positive things most of the time.”

*Photo provided by Cliff Bolton*

Gerard Joe, a Mi'kmaq from Conne River, Newfoundland, considered his time with 4 Combat Engineer Regiment in Lahr, West Germany, to be the highlight of his career. ‘You were in a foreign country and it just made your training ... more realistic,’ he remembered. In his time off he travelled and saw ‘things that you’ve only read about in history books,’ such as the Rhine River, Munich, and King Ludwig’s castle.

The adjustment to military life could be difficult, but did offer the possibility of adventure and personal growth. Joe John Sanipass of Big Cove, New Brunswick, found the strict discipline, morning inspections and shoe shining to be very foreign, but after he met a group of ‘natives from Saskatchewan... he just fit right in there.’ For others, their background served them well in the field. Bill Lafferty of the Northwest Territories felt that the ‘long,



long sunlight in the summer months' and the long, dark winter nights to which he was accustomed allowed him to function almost anywhere. He had no trouble adapting to service in the Sinai Desert. Stephen Simon remembers a field training exercise in 1955; he had been talking about his culture with a curious friend and one day 'they took away all our canvas and everything...I said "just stick with me, if you are willing to work hard we are going to have an enjoyable time, we are going to be comfortable."' Together they made a tepee and a pot out of birch bark to boil water and caught a rabbit. Wes Whitford of Ashmount, Alberta, believes that his time in the army helped him to respect himself more and to land better jobs afterwards. 'I was able to cope pretty well with the discipline,' Whitford explained, 'and it gave me more confidence I believe. I enjoyed it.'

Several CF members saw a strong connection between their own service and those of their Aboriginal predecessors. 'My people, the Blackfoot, were awesome warriors,' explained Major Robert E. Crane (retired), who served with the Signal Corps in such places as Germany, Alert, and the Persian Gulf. His father was a veteran of the Korean Conflict, and Crane 'want[ed] to make something of myself, so joining the military seemed the right path to take.... The military taught me valuable skills such as self-discipline and teamwork.' Master Corporal Brian Innes joined the military for the adventure, and he acknowledged, '... the military has had an influence on my family for generations. My father served in Korea and my grandfather served in World War II, along with

other family members. I guess it is part of my heritage and family honour to serve our country, and to help our people when they are in need of assistance.'

Ed Borchert, who was born in Red Deer, Alberta, joined the military in 1964 and served until 1995. 'Going into the army just meant a steady pay cheque and one less mouth for my mother to worry about at home,' he explained. During his career he served in 'every rank from lance corporal to company sergeant major,' and then in 1983 he was commissioned as a captain, eventually being promoted to major. Borchert described how military service 'taught me self-reliance, leadership. It taught me that the soldier was the most important component of our military and to respect them and to ensure that they were well cared for while meeting the aims of the organization.' One of the best things about the CF, he explained, was that:

*if you were an aboriginal person, or if you were a black person, or a purple person it didn't matter. The only thing we ever cared about was were you doing your job. When you got in the trench I was responsible for the guy in the trench with me and his protection. We fought shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and there was no colour, there was no race, we were all soldiers and it was excellent.*

Borchert's service gave him 'great pride in our military both past and present.'

## The Post-Cold War World

Jocelyn Paul joined the reserves in 1988, while he was working on his Master's degree at the University of Montreal. After working for the Attikamek-Innu (Montagnais) Council, he decided to transfer to the regular force in 1991 and became a platoon commander with the Royal 22e Régiment. It was not an easy time: after the Oka Crisis, when Mohawks and their supporters had engaged in a lengthy standoff with the Quebec provincial police and the Canadian Forces, some soldiers « n'avaient pas nécessairement tous une bonne opinion des Indiens. » With time, however, he noticed that the military personnel who were prone to generalize about Aboriginal people learned that the situation was more complex than any one stereotype could accommodate.

The end of the Cold War did not bring the anticipated 'peace dividend.' Although the Canadian Forces went through a period of retrenchment in the 1990s, the tempo of peacekeeping and peacemaking operations increased. Aboriginal servicemen and women continued to serve in conflict zones around the world. For his part, Jocelyn Paul served as a lieutenant in the Krajina sector of Croatia from October 1993 to April 1994. « La Croatie, la Bosnie c'était vraiment encore la guerre », he explained. « Ça

fait que j'ai vu les ravages de la guerre, les champs de mines partout, les gens qui étaient affamés, les gens qui n'avaient pas de quoi se nourrir, les gens qui étaient un peu terrorisés par les bombardements, les Croates bombardaient les Serbes et les Serbes bombardaient les Croates. » After another tour to the former Yugoslavia, Captain Paul became aide-de-camp for Governor General Roméo LeBlanc from 1995 to 1997. In 1992 and 1993, Corporal Corena Letendre (an Anishnawbe woman from Pinamootung First Nations in Manitoba), then serving with 2 Service Battalion, deployed to Cambodia, supporting that country's elections. 'We transported the supplies from one part of the country to the other,' she explained. 'From the north to the south and the east and west of the country, to the port cities, to the northern part of the country. So that could be anything from supplying the UN polling stations and ensuring that there was free and fair elections.' She also volunteered at a local orphanage, 'taking care of the babies that were there, a lot of little ones, and I changed their diapers or helped with the medication, or gave them ointment.' Letendre's daughter was still a baby when she deployed to Cambodia, so these visits 'to go and help take care of those little ones there' provided her 'baby fix.'



**Corena Letendre, Sauleaux from Fairford, Manitoba in the Canadian Army and Air Force.**

"I was through Cambodia... in '92-'93...we went there as a contingent to go and support the elections... I worked at Canada House during the days that I had time off. ...There was a picture that was taken during a time when I had brought the Canadian Camp over to introduce them to the orphanage that was there... [We were] taking care of the babies that were there, a lot of little ones... I changed their diapers or helped with the medication, or gave them ointment. It was quite interesting because when I had left to go to Cambodia my daughter was not a year old when I left. So to have, what I call my baby fix, I would go there. [It had been] kind of hard to leave my baby behind. So I went there to go and help take care of those little ones... The picture...with myself holding the little one. That little one there to me symbolizes what the Canadian Forces is about: ... being able to go anywhere, anyplace and anytime and to be able to lay your heart on the line for that very aspect of caring and nurturing those around us...It's protecting and nurturing that is the closest to us."

*Department of National Defence photo*



The tradition of overseas service continues in Afghanistan and other Canadian missions abroad. On 3 September 2006, during Operation MEDUSA in Afghanistan, Corporal Jason Funnell of 7 Platoon, Charles Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, braved intense enemy fire to come to the assistance of his comrades trapped in a disabled vehicle in an enemy kill zone. Ignoring his personal safety by twice crossing ground covered by effective enemy fire, Corporal Funnell – Haida from British Columbia – successfully assisted in the treatment and evacuation of his injured and killed comrades while returning effective fire. His brave and professional actions saved lives and allowed the orderly withdrawal of his platoon under heavy fire. For his exploits, Funnell was awarded the Medal of Military Valour. Corporal Doug Tizya, a member of the Old Crow First Nation, served with the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Afghanistan. Only days after arriving for his second tour in August 2006, he was injured in a rocket propelled grenade and mortar attack on the Canadian base in Panjwahi. Tizya took severe shrapnel wounds in the arm and was sent back to Canada for rehabilitation. After returning home, he was honoured with the Wounded Warrior Dance and conferred a Spirit name by the Bear Clan of the Ojibway Nation during their annual Spirit of the Bear Ceremony.

Aboriginal support for warriors and peacekeepers overseas comes in various forms. For example, in October 2006, Ice Bear, a Chippewa artist from Cape Croker, Ontario, donated a reproduction of a print of an Aboriginal warrior roaring a battle cry to deployed troops in Kandahar. "A warrior in our society is one who defends those who cannot defend themselves," Bear explained. "Our warriors who go to Afghanistan go to defend those women and children who cannot defend themselves." The following month, Aboriginal rocker Gary Sappier entertained troops during the Task Force Afghanistan Show Tour in Kandahar. The wars of the 21st Century, like those of early eras, are collective efforts.

In 2002, official estimates suggested that 1,300 Aboriginal persons were serving in the Canadian Forces. This represents 2.3% of the Regular Force and 1.8% of the Primary Reserve. Although these percentages are below those of Aboriginal peoples in the general Canadian population, this level of participation still affirms that there is significant interest in and commitment to national defence. Furthermore, this statistic does not include Aboriginal persons serving with the Canadian Rangers, a unique military formation: sixty percent of its ranks are filled with persons of Aboriginal ancestry.

## The Canadian Rangers

The onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s drew unprecedented attention to the Canadian North. If the United States and the Soviet Union went to war, the northern approaches to the continent would serve as a likely battleground. In this light, the Canadian military took steps to establish a footprint in northern, isolated, and coastal areas. The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR) had been disbanded in 1945, but this force helped inspire the creation of the Canadian Rangers two years later. Like

the PCMR, the Canadian Rangers would be comprised of part-time, unpaid volunteers who would carry out military duties on a daily basis alongside their civilian lives. Rather than being limited to the Pacific coast, as the PCMR had been, the Canadian Rangers extended nationally. Armed with only a .303 calibre Lee-Enfield rifle, 100-rounds of ammunition each year and an arm-band, the Rangers had several roles in peacetime. They would act as guides for southern troops on exercises in their region, drawing upon their intimate knowledge of



**Canadian Rangers unload from Griffon Helicopter during Operation NARWHAL 07**

Flight engineer Corporal Pat Audet, of 430 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, assists Canadian Rangers as they unload from a CH-146 Griffon helicopter during Operation NARWHAL 07.

Photo by Sgt Brad Phillips [The Maple Leaf, 13 June 2007]

the local area, and would prepare local defence schemes with police and report suspicious activities. Because the Rangers, in their civilian jobs, would be out on the land in their local areas on a daily basis, this detection role seemed logical. Furthermore, the Rangers could provide search and rescue parties when required. In wartime, their roles would also include coast watching and providing local defences against small enemy detachments or saboteurs.

Given the demographics of isolated and remote areas – and particularly in the Territorial North – Aboriginal people played an important role as the force spread across the arctic in the 1950s. The military benefited from having Rangers with an intimate knowledge of the local environment and cultures. When the military authorized the formation of companies on Baffin Island in 1951, officials responsible for Eskimo Affairs believed that Ranger service would also be good for the Inuit. One senior official stressed that the Inuit were ‘reliable, honest and intelligent and would make good Rangers,’ and recognized that a rifle and bullets were significant assets in a hunting culture. Aboriginal peoples serving with the Rangers guided and advised regular forces on exercises in the north, and provided a permanent presence in support of Canadian sovereignty and security.

The importance of the Rangers drew renewed attention in the early 1970s when arctic sovereignty became an

important issue once again. The military launched initiatives to increase Aboriginal peoples’ representation in the armed forces, and the reconstitution of the northern Rangers seemed to represent the most successful activity undertaken. Northern Aboriginal persons who served in the Rangers could remain in and serve their communities while at the same time serving as a Ranger. For the Canadian Forces, the Rangers provided a visible assertion of sovereignty at minimal cost – important considerations at a time when the government was cutting back military spending and personnel. Patrols spanned the breadth of the arctic, from Broughton Island to Aklavik, and represented every Aboriginal group in the North. The Rangers’ interactions with regular and reserve force units contributed to greater cross-cultural awareness and the sharing of invaluable survival skills.

With strong backing from the Aboriginal community, the government indicated in 1987 that the Ranger programme would be continued and enhanced. The Minister of National Defence deemed them ‘an important expression of sovereignty,’ and by the end of the century almost every community that could sustain a patrol in the far north had one. Units were formed in Labrador and Nunavik (northern Quebec), along Hudson and James Bay, and along the British Columbia coast. The Rangers play an increasingly prominent and symbolic role in promoting sovereignty and security.



According to a 2007 report, there are approximately 4,200 Rangers in 163 patrols across Canada, organized in five Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups (CRPGs), and this number is expected to increase to 4,800 in 2008. 1 CRPG encompasses 58 patrols in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut. It is the largest patrol group, with 1,575 Rangers. 2 CRPG includes 23 Quebec patrols, totalling 696 Rangers. 3 CRPG has 15 patrols in northern Ontario numbering 422 Rangers. 4 CRPG encompasses 695 Rangers in 38 patrols on the Pacific coast of British Columbia, northern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Lastly, 5 CRPG includes 29 Ranger patrols in Newfoundland and Labrador, with 743 Rangers. While official statistics do not break down the membership along ethnic lines, more than fifty percent of all Rangers are of Aboriginal descent and patrols are representative of northern Canada's ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity. North of the tree line, for example, the vast majority of Rangers are Inuit and many speak Inuktitut as their first (and sometimes only) language.

The Rangers are unique in several respects. They elect their own patrol leaders from amongst their local membership, and decision-making within patrols respects local cultural and political norms. They are not issued with typical military uniforms. Instead, the military assumes that those who enlist are able to survive in their local environment by virtue of their 'typical' civilian clothing and equipment. As a result, the uniform for these

part-time reservists only consists of a red sweatshirt, T-shirt, ball cap, brassard, safety vest and toque. The government now issues each member 200-rounds of ammunition. They provide other equipment, such as skidoos and boats, themselves but are compensated for its use on Ranger exercises. In most patrol groups, there is also no mandatory retirement age. This means that some Rangers are the longest serving members of the Canadian Forces. Johnny Tookalook and Johnassie Iqaluk from Sanikiluaq were enlisted in 1947, the year the force was created, and have been Rangers ever since. Abraham Irqu from Akulivik and Peter Kunilusie from Clyde River were recognized for 52 years of continual service as Rangers. Ollie Ittinuar, a Ranger from Rankin Inlet, was still serving with the Rangers at the age of 87. So long as Rangers can still perform their duties on the land, they are not forced to step down as active members.

As Canadian Forces reservists, the role of the Rangers, first and foremost, is 'to provide a military presence in those sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas of Canada which cannot conveniently or economically be provided by other components of the Canadian Forces.' They watch for unusual activities along the coasts and in their communities, and provide early warning, territorial surveillance, ground search and rescue, and reconnaissance capabilities to the Canadian Forces based on their local geographic and traditional indigenous knowledge. 'I'm very proud to be a Canadian Ranger,'



**Cliff Bolton, Tsimisiam from Port Essington, British Columbia in Army cadets. Playing here with the St. George's Indian Residential School band, affiliated with the Rocky Mountain Rangers.**

"[Being a cadet] taught you a lot of things: all the military drills, the marching, having parades, we learned a lot about the radiophones and the Morse code and we learned how to handle rifles and submachine guns... the young boys had to learn a lot of precision things, how to handle [weapons], rifle drill, and the marching and we also had bugle bands that were very good."

*Photo provided by Cliff Bolton*

Sergeant Nick Mantla, of Wha'ti, in the Northwest Territories explained. 'It's a way to serve my country as well as my people. It's important for me to pass on some of the northern knowledge ... to help with my skill in the bush, and to help with the military.' They pass their knowledge on to the Canadian Forces, but also to other community members. The Junior Canadian Rangers, a structured youth programme began in 1996, provides

Rangers and youth in their communities with an opportunity to share local cultural values and traditional skills across generations. Everyone benefits as a result.

The Rangers' operational achievements are varied and impressive, from intelligence gathering to search and rescue. In the far north and along the coasts, the Rangers regularly serve as guides and survival experts

for southern units operating in their local areas, and this fosters mutual learning and understanding. Although Rangers often perform vital ground search and rescue as civilians rather than as an official military tasking, their military knowledge and organization is vital to their communities, particularly in remote regions where no other organized groups exist. When a devastating avalanche hit Kangiqsualujjuaq, Quebec, on 1 January 1999, nine inhabitants died and some 70 were injured. The 28 members of the local Ranger patrol and more than forty other Rangers from 2 CRPG responded immediately to the emergency. For their efforts, 2 CRPG received the Chief of Defence Staff Commendation from the Chief of the Defence Staff. ‘The members of 2 CRPG have become known across the country for their efforts,’ General Maurice Baril explained. ‘Were it not for the immediate response of the Canadian Rangers of 2 CRPG and their work throughout Nunavik, this disaster would surely have cost more lives. Their discipline and selflessness were of tremendous help in dealing with the aftermath of this sad event. The members of this Group are worthy of the proudest traditions of the CF.’

On 14 February 2000, at Rideau Hall in Ottawa, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada and Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Forces, was pleased to bestow upon selected members of the Canadian Rangers, the Special Service Medal, with the special ‘RANGER’ clasp, in

recognition of their unique and outstanding contributions to the defence and security of the Canadian homeland. ‘You are the eyes and ears of the military in remote communities,’ she said, ‘You support the military and help protect our sovereignty.... Your skills, your knowledge, your know-how, are unparalleled.... You, the Canadian Rangers, have made great contributions to the north and you continue to do so – and to our journey as fellow Canadians. I thank you.’

The Canadian Rangers are valuable assets to their communities, to the military, and to Canada as a whole. Current projections and concerns about the affects that climate change (global warming) may have on northern Canada suggest that the Rangers will be even more critical in the near future. In April 2008, for example, Canadian Rangers from across the territorial north participated in Operation Nunavut and, working with a team of scientists, found that the largest remaining ice shelf in the northern hemisphere was deteriorating quickly. If ships can transit the Northwest Passage year-round within the next two decades, as some estimates forecast, Canada may face a new host of challenges in its north. The recent emphasis on Arctic sovereignty and security ensures that the Rangers will continue to provide an important symbolic and practical presence in any future context, and as the number of patrols and individual Rangers expands so too will their contributions to the attainment of Canada’s defence objectives.





## Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

The ongoing contributions of Aboriginal peoples to the Canadian military make them a valuable part of the Defence team. As a result, the military has introduced a number of initiatives to promote increased Aboriginal participation in the Canadian Forces. Several notable programmes and policies have been designed to increase awareness of military career opportunities and to make the military environment more comfortable for Aboriginal peoples.

In the early 1970s, the military began to undertake special recruiting efforts to encourage Aboriginal peoples' enlistment. The Northern Native Entry Programme was introduced in 1971 to attract Aboriginal peoples living north of the 60th parallel to the Canadian Forces. A special recruiting organization was established to visit communities across the arctic on a regular basis. Interested Aboriginal candidates then attended pre-recruit training to help them meet the potential challenges of service life. The success rate was poor, however, as few recruits met the required educational standards, even

## Tribute paid to Aboriginal Veterans

The provisions of the Veterans' Charter – that package of benefits and entitlements bestowed upon newly returned veterans by a grateful nation following the Second World War – were in some cases unequally applied to the newly returned status Indian servicemen and women. Geographic isolation, communications difficulties and bureaucratic confusions arising from split jurisdictions to which Indian veterans were subject (Indian Affairs, Veterans Affairs, National Defence) in numerous instances prevented individuals from receiving the full range of benefits to which they may have been entitled. The resolution of such claims remains an outstanding issue today among Aboriginal veterans and their families. On June 21st, 2001, Aboriginal veterans gathered in Ottawa for the unveiling of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument (above).

*Photo by Victoria Fulford, Legion Magazine, Sept/Oct 2001, page 72*

fewer completed basic training, and only a tiny fraction pursued a career in the Canadian Forces. Accordingly, the programme was placed on hold in 1999.

New enlistment initiatives have followed and reaped better rewards for Aboriginal participants and the military. The Bold Eagle programme began in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Department of National Defence, Indian Affairs, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), and the Saskatchewan Indian Veteran's Association. Its goal was to build self-esteem amongst Aboriginal youth in the Prairie provinces. The program consisted of six-weeks of basic militia recruit training coupled with First Nations cultural awareness activities provided by FSIN and conducted by elders. Participants received a general familiarity with life and service in the Canadian Forces. It has proved a 'soaring success.' For example, 58 of 59 candidates in the 1999 Bold Eagle exercise graduated. Graduates have no requirement to join the primary reserves after the completion of the course, but they have the opportunity. In 1999, ten of the participants went on to join the primary reserve and three to join the regular force. Many more have returned to their communities with newfound self-confidence. Howard Anderson, Grand Chief of the Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans, adds that the kids come out of the Bold Eagle Programme with 'their heads up in the air and they are proud as hell. Really and truly they are really a proud bunch of kids when they are done.'

Bombardier Kisha Potts, a graduate of the programme, joined the reserves and has since served in Afghanistan. Another programme, the Sergeant Tommy Prince Army Training Initiative, is designed to increase the number of Aboriginal people serving in the infantry and related combat arms trades. Recruiting them in platoon strength and providing them with specialized indoctrination that takes into account Aboriginal views and values accomplish this.

The Canadian Forces Aboriginal Entry Programme was introduced in 2000 so that qualified Aboriginal people could learn more about full-time regular force training and employment opportunities before they actually join the military. Whereas the Northern Native Entry Programme focussed exclusively on recruiting young people from remote northern areas, the present programme accommodates Aboriginal recruits from all regions of the country. It consists of two pre-recruit training courses: the first is held in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, for recruits living in the far north; and the second in Farnham, Quebec, for all Aboriginal recruits in the programme. Upon completion of the course, candidates can apply to join the regular force and begin basic recruit training, but they are not obliged to do so. At the time the programme was announced, the Minister of National Defence hoped that it would double the proportion of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis personnel serving in the Canadian Forces to three-percent.





**Corporal Joceylne Bauman, Jingle Dancer**

Corporal Jocelyne Bauman is a traditional Aboriginal jingle dancer. A clerk, she is with The South Alberta Light Horse, attached-posted to the 1 Military Police Unit in Edmonton.

*Photo by Pte Melissa Spence [The Maple Leaf 6 June 2007]*

In 2007, Chief Military Personnel announced ‘The Aboriginal Leadership Opportunity Year (ALOY)’ as a one-year programme that will be offered at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario for approximately 30 Aboriginal candidates. The first intake will commence at the beginning of the 2008 academic year. This programme, under the direction of the Canadian Defence Academy, is ‘an important step in providing opportunities for Aboriginal candidates to socialize, interact in a bilingual environment, learn in a multicultural environment, and to develop and foster leadership skills in a uniquely diverse context.’ The aim of the programme is to expose selected Aboriginal candidates to an environment where they will have opportunities to undertake academic education, acquire military skills, develop leadership abilities and engage in athletics. This program seeks to foster leadership and personal growth in a supportive and challenging learning environment, contribute to Canadian Forces outreach to Canadian communities, and provide Aboriginal individuals with the opportunity to serve Canada in a leadership role, potentially through employment in the Canadian Forces. ALOY candidates are selected from all regions of Canada by a Senior Review Committee that is composed of senior departmental military and civilian members with advice from an Aboriginal Advisory Council of educational advisors from four major Aboriginal groups (Assembly of First Nations, Métis National Council, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatomi and National Association of Friendship Centres) and cultural support activities will be conducted in consultation with the Council.



Over the last decade, the military has taken other significant steps to make the Canadian Forces a more accommodating place for Aboriginal peoples and their unique cultures. The Defence Aboriginal Advisory Group supports the Aboriginal-military relationship by identifying issues that affect Aboriginal employees and serving members of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, improving retention rates, and providing comfortable and productive working

environments for Aboriginal people. The military has also taken steps to accommodate religious beliefs by allowing Aboriginal members to wear their hair in braids while in uniform, so long as safety is not compromised. The Forces recognizes that they derive much strength from the diversity of Canadian society, and Aboriginal members are a vital part of their future strategy to remain a proud institution, representative of Canada's peoples and their common values and aspirations.

**Sergeant Ron Leblanc (crouching) with Veterans of The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own) during Operation SUMMIT DUKE.**

Aboriginals serving abroad with today's Canadian Forces continue to add to their rich military heritage. They also do much to preserve the heritage of the units in which they serve here at home. Pictured (crouching) with veterans is Sgt Ronald R. Leblanc of the The British Columbia Regiment (BCR). In 2006, Sgt Leblanc organized a small unit expedition to scale two Rocky Mountain peaks located at Peter Lougheed Provincial Park in Kananaskis, Alberta. The aim of "Operation SUMMIT DUKE" was to place two memorial plaques atop the Rocky Mountain peaks named in honour of two former Commanding Officers. In an agreement with Parks Canada the two plaques were instead installed at the trail head at Upper Kananaskis Lake overlooking the two peaks. Mount Hart-McHarg is named in honour of LCol William Frederick Hart-McHarg killed in action at the Second Battle of Ypres 24 April 1915. Mount Worthington honours LCol Donald Grant Worthington killed in action during the Battle of Normandy, 09 August 1944.

*Maggie Davidson collection*





# Conclusion



## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the long and proud Aboriginal traditions of alliance with the Crown, of loyalty in times of trial, and of military service in defence of the nation and its interests abroad. The process was begun in the earliest stages of the French era, when many indigenous tribes and confederacies built lasting alliances with New France. That pattern was disrupted following the destruction of French power in Canada during the Seven Years War and the Pontiac Rebellion. When the American colonists rebelled against the crown, Britain came to fulfil the primary role as ally to the Aboriginal peoples of the northeast. Indigenous warriors fought for their own lands and homes through to 1815. Their efforts and coordination with British military actions helped save Canada from conquest by the armies of the new United States of America.

Though shifting demographics decreased the geo-strategic importance of Aboriginal peoples' military role, the traditions continued. They were renewed during the 19th Century in the Rebellions, the Fenian threat and the unrest in the Northwest. The military relationship evolved as indigenous men were sought out individually for their specialised skills to serve in defence of crown interests and with Canadian expeditionary forces overseas. The Nile Expedition and the South African War provided the

precedents for the substantial service that Aboriginal soldiers rendered to Canadian arms during the World Wars and the Korean Conflict. Through the latter half of the 20th Century and into the present century, new generations of First Nations, Métis and Inuit men and women have served in the Canadian regular and reserve forces, and Rangers, both at home and abroad. And this proud tradition lives on today.

### **Captain Catherine Askew, Cree from Moose Factory, Ontario, Canadian Forces chaplain**

Captain Catherine Askew, instructor at the Canadian Forces Chaplain School, CFB Borden pictured at left, with the Chaplain-General of the Canadian Forces, Brigadier-General Stanley Johnstone. Captain Askew delivered a prayer in both Cree and English during the re-dedication ceremony held at the Vimy Memorial to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 09 April 2007.

Photo by MCpl Jill Cooper





For a long time, the loyalty and service of Aboriginal peoples went largely unnoticed in the broader Canadian community, and even within many indigenous communities. It was Aboriginal veterans themselves that reignited interest and appreciation for their sacrifices and efforts on behalf of the nation. The flash point was the contentious issue of the treatment that they as veterans received after the wars in which they fought. The matter was a source of strain for years, but it was crucial in raising the profile of Aboriginal military service. This history is an outgrowth and symbol of that increased interest. Another acknowledgment is the annual observances on National Aboriginal Day and on Remembrance Day that provide all Canadians with an opportunity to pause and reflect upon the cost to Aboriginal peoples through which Canadian sovereignty, security and peace have been achieved and maintained over the span of some four centuries.

In the late 1990s and early part of the new century, veterans' efforts bore fruit in the creation of the National Round Table on First Nations Veterans' Issues, a coming together of First Nations Veterans associations, the Assembly of First Nations, National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs to investigate their grievances. The process led to the recognition that First Nations veterans had been disadvantaged in their access to veterans' benefits, an apology, and a government offer of compensation in 2002.

On National Aboriginal Day, June 21, 2001, Her Excellency the Right-Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, presided at the unveiling of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa. Her speech was filled with warm appreciation for the history recorded in this book, summarized by the words on the Monument itself:

This monument is raised in sacred and everlasting honour of the contributions of all Aboriginal Canadians in war and peacekeeping operations.

Many thousands of Aboriginal people saw action and endured hardship in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. They served with honour and distinction in all branches of the service and in every rank and appointment from Private to Brigadier. They fought overseas to defend the sovereignty and liberty of allied nations, in addition to supporting the cause at home. Their dedication continues in peacekeeping operations in faraway lands.

Their heroic acts earned many decorations for bravery as well as the respect and enduring friendship of their comrades in arms. Hundreds from across Canada gave fully of their lives so that all Canadians might know peace and inherit freedom.

We who follow in their path are humbled by the magnitude of their sacrifice and inspired by the depths of their resolve. We owe them a debt of gratitude we cannot soon hope to repay.

Their legacy lives on. When Captain Catherine Askew, an Anglican chaplain from the Moose Factory Cree Nation, presided over a wreath lying ceremony at Vimy Ridge in April 2007, on the 90th anniversary of that famous battle, she delivered her prayer in English and Cree. “We have to give thanks for all the sacrifices they made willingly and how they have contributed to our lives today,” she explained. Her words honoured the thousands of young Aboriginal men who had served their country:

*Eyam ahatauw*

*Ni moo shoo muk / noo koom muk / gitche Manitou  
Ni mah moo he too nan / ah nooch / kah kee see kak  
Oh tah eh may tay kwa yak  
Ki keh ski see tee tak / ki chi wa shi she muk  
Kee nah kah tah mook / oh ski ni pi mah ti si win  
Eh koo mah kah / kee mis kah mook / un ni mah  
Kah ki stat ti kook  
Eh nuk keh skuk ah ni mah / ah kah kee too chi kah tek  
Kee mah si kewk / kah she mas kan nuk  
Puh ki te nan / kee kis ske see yak  
ah kah kee chi too tah kik / moo lah kah / she nah  
koon ni pun  
ni pi ma ti soon ah nooch*

*puh ki te nan kee kis ske see yak / may koch  
Ni moo shoo muk / noo koom muk / gitche Manitou  
kee meen te nan / oh mah / ah noch kah kee she kak  
oh mah / ah yum chi kay win  
eh kway chi mi tak pi shik ki tah yun  
may koch eh may tay kwa yak  
oh kik kah mah shi kay chik na peh wuk  
kah nee kan tay chik  
kah kee shi ni kah soot ki koo sis  
kah kee pah chi pam moo tat oh tay  
Chi meeg-wetch, chi meeg-wetch, chi meeg-wetch.*

*Hi, hi.*

*Grandfathers, grandmothers, Good Creator:*

*We gather here today in this place of honour to  
remember your children.*

*In the face of the impossible,*

*they fought a battle which helped to win the war.*

*Let us remember that without their sacrifice,  
our lives would not be as they are.*

*Grandfathers, grandmothers, good Creator:*

*We hand over to you this day our prayers  
and ask that you always be with us*

*as we honour these warriors that went before us.*

*In the name of your Son who walked among us.*

*Amen.*

*Conclusion*



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**Canadian Ranger Mary-Jane Kunkel, Operation NARWHAL 07**

Canadian Ranger Mary-Jane Kunkel reacts with glee after her first flight in a Griffon helicopter. Ranger Kunkel is one of many Canadian Rangers who participated in Operation NARWHAL 07.  
*Photo by Sgt Brad Phillips [The Maple Leaf, 13 June 07]*