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EUROPEAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN WARFARE 1675–1815

Armstrong Starkey

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Armstrong Starkey

Adelphi University

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Preface

European and Native American warfare is well travelled ground in North American historiography. Captivity narratives and accounts of Indian campaigns were popular reading during the colonial era and controversies over frontier warfare helped shape an American nationalist tradition. In the nineteenth century Francis Parkman portrayed the Anglo-French struggle for the continent on a broad canvas against a chiaroscuro background of savagery and untamed wilderness. Parkman's history captured the spirit of Anglo-American manifest destiny to rule a continental empire. The French and their Indian allies were its inevitable victims.

Like most Americans of my generation, my sense of frontier warfare was founded upon Parkman, fortified by the work of novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper and Kenneth Roberts. Indeed, when I first naïvely approached this subject as a military historian, I was unaware how much things had changed. This book reflects significant historiographical developments over the last 25 years: the overthrow of Parkman's thesis by the historian Francis Jennings, whose own work is best captured in the title of his book *The Invasion of America*. Not only did Jennings portray the Anglo-Americans as brutal invaders, but he discredited Parkman as a reputable historian. Jennings has also contributed to the development of ethnohistory, a discipline combining historical and anthropological methods, which seeks to understand Native Americans on their own terms. For the first time the Europeans' opponents have been given a voice of their own and with that a point of view. I have profited enormously from the work of experts in the field who have given me an understanding of and appreciation for the lives of native peoples and the Indian way of war.

This book is about warfare and I view it as a work of military history. It is about conflict on the frontier, a zone in which Europeans and Indians engaged in conflict and co-operation. This was as true of warfare as of any other aspect of life. Europeans and Indians fought with one another and allied with one

were most successful. Europeans arrived in North America at a time when Europe is sometimes said to have been undergoing a "military revolution", a concept that has generated considerable debate among scholars. European soldiers brought the new weapons and techniques associated with this revolution with them to North America and by 1675 had provoked a military revolution of a sort among Native Americans, a revolution that for 140 years gave them a tactical advantage over their more numerous and wealthier opponents. European success in the frontier wars depended on their ability to strike the right balance between their own military traditions and the Indian way of war. Thus, as I hope this work makes clear, European military developments in themselves did not guarantee the conquest of the continent.

In addition to the many scholars acknowledged in my notes, I wish to give special thanks to those who read part or all of my manuscript: Jeremy Black, who suggested that I begin the project in the first place, Colin Calloway, Francis Jennings, whose good-humoured response to my comments about his own work I greatly appreciated, and an anonymous reviewer. I also thank my colleagues in the Adelphi University History Department who read parts of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the staffs of the Adelphi University Library, the New York Public Library, the British Library, the William L.Clements Library of the University of Michigan, the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, the Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh, and the Public Records Office, Kew.

Chapter One

Introduction: raiders in the wilderness

Fort Bull

On 27 March 1756, a starving and exhausted raiding party of French, Canadians and American Indians emerged from the forest near Fort Bull, a fortified Anglo-American storage depot located at the great portage on the way from Schenectady, New York to Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario. The detachment of 362 men under the command of Lieutenant Chaussegros de Léry had made an arduous 15-day march from Lachine struggling through heavy snow, ice and torrential rains. Despite the deer shot by their Indian hunters, the men had been without food for two days.[1]

Now they found themselves astride a much travelled military supply road linking Wood Creek with the Mohawk River. At 10.00 am Léry's Indian scouts captured two sleighs loaded with provisions and the party broke its involuntary fast. Learning that a servant accompanying the sleighs had escaped to give the alarm at neighbouring Fort Williams at the far end of the portage, Léry determined to attack Fort Bull immediately. The Indians in his force protested this decision. They argued that they were fortunate to have captured sufficient food to see them home and that it would be tempting fate to try more. "If he desired absolutely to perish", they said, "he was master of his Frenchmen."

Léry was an experienced frontier commander. Born in Canada, the son of a French military engineer, he had been commissioned as an officer in the *troupes de marine*, French regulars stationed in the colonies and commanded by colonial officers. Although following in his father's footsteps by qualifying as an engineer, he had cut his teeth in frontier warfare during raids on the New England frontier in 1746–8. Now he demonstrated his ability to lead Indian warriors. Recognizing that Indians seldom risked an assault on a fortified

position, he replied that he did not wish to expose them, but asked for only two volunteers to serve as guides. Eventually, some 20 of the 103 Indians, aroused by drams of brandy, agreed to join in the assault. The remainder posted themselves in ambush along the road from Fort Williams.

Léry hoped to surprise Fort Bull without firing a shot. His French and Canadian troops, a mix of regulars (*troupes de terre* recently despatched from France), colony regulars and Canadian militia, fixed bayonets and advanced quickly upon the fort. But the Indians, on flushing a small English work party, emitted a war whoop which alerted the garrison, who managed to bar the gate. Fort Bull was not a proper fort in the eighteenth-century European style. Rather it was a stockaded supply depot and the garrison of 60 men was armed only with muskets and grenades. When the French-Canadians gained possession of the loopholes in the fence, they were able to fire into the fort and the enclosed area became a killing ground. Under the cover of this ferocious fire, the gate was soon battered in. One account of the engagement indicates that Léry summoned the English commander to surrender, promising quarter to the garrison, but was answered by a volley of musketry. Such an offer and refusal could be used to justify the subsequent event. Breaking into Fort Bull during a bitter struggle of almost an hour, the French-Canadians bayoneted nearly the entire garrison. No more than three or four prisoners were taken.

On hearing the sounds of battle, the British garrison at Fort Williams despatched a relief force. They promptly fell into an ambush by the Indians posted on the road. Seventeen of the Fort Williams party were killed before they could regain the protection of their stockade. One of the Indian chiefs asked Léry if he now proposed to attack the other fort. He replied that "he would do so forthwith if the Indians would follow him. This reply drove this Chief off, and all his party prepared to go after him."

Léry himself may have had no intention of attacking Fort Williams, which he knew to be provided with cannon and more strongly built than Fort Bull. The latter had caught fire during the battle and the powder magazine exploded, destroying all of the supplies accumulated within the depot. Aware that large Anglo-American reinforcements would soon appear, he led his men back into the forest for the trek to Lake Ontario. Again food ran short. The raiders subsisted in part upon horse flesh and "had even devoured a porcupine without any other dressing than sufficed just to scorch off the hair and quills". All depended upon meeting supply boats at the appointed rendezvous. After a march of seven days, they arrived only to find the bay empty. This cast the raiders into despair as once again they faced the prospect of starvation. They kept a cold and hungry watch until M. de la Saussaye arrived with the rescue bateaux on 13 April, 17 days after the attack on Fort Bull.

Léry had executed a remarkable winter raid with the loss of only three dead and seven wounded. He had exposed the fragility of Fort Oswego's supply line and dealt a severe blow to Anglo-American preparations for a summer offensive on Lake Ontario. Aside from the material damage, this successful deep strike into British territory sapped Anglo-American morale. Indeed, it may be said to have been the opening move in the Marquis de Montcalm's capture of Fort Oswego in August 1756, a victory which strengthened the French grip upon the Ohio country.

Aside from its strategic significance, this little campaign offers insight into the issues of this book: European versus North American Indian styles of warfare. As should be evident from the preceding account, the two styles were not necessarily incompatible. Léry's force included a large party of allied Iroquois, Algonquin and Nepissing Indians who played an indispensable role as scouts, hunters and skirmishers. The French-Canadian raiders, striking out into the forest in the midst of winter without an assured source of food, had adapted themselves to an Indian way of war which demanded tremendous physical endurance and indifference to deprivation. Still, it is unlikely that they would have risked such a march without Indian support. Once the battle for Fort Bull erupted, the two styles of war parted: the Europeans fixed bayonets and assaulted a fortified position while the majority of the Indians withdrew into the woods to prepare an ambush. The latter reminded Léry that he was master of the French, but not of them. They considered themselves allies rather than subordinates bound to follow orders not to their liking. He was intelligent enough not to force the issue, but rather found a way by which they could render useful service. The outcome of the assault upon the fort was a "massacre". Indeed, more people were slain at Fort Bull than during the celebrated "massacre" at Fort William Henry in 1757. But the slaughter at Fort Bull was carried out by French-Canadian troops who gave no quarter to the hapless garrison once they stormed the gate. If it is true that Fort Bull's commander had rejected Léry's summons, the killing of the defenders was consistent with European military custom and the laws of war. This should be kept in mind when one considers the "barbaric" martial customs of eighteenth-century North American forest Indians.

Léry's achievement may be contrasted with that of his contemporary, Major Robert Rogers, whose rangers were the most famous Anglo-American frontier fighters of the time. Although he was a bitter enemy of the French-Canadians and their Indian allies, he admired the martial culture and warlike methods of the Indians and adapted them to his own use. Like most successful frontier commanders, he included companies of Indians among his troops. While his battle success was mixed, his rangers were the invaluable eyes of the Anglo-American army in the Lake George-Lake Champlain region during the

Seven Years War. In September 1759, Rogers led a force of rangers against the Catholic Abenaki Indian settlement at St Francis near Montreal. During the march overland from Lake Champlain, nearly a quarter of his force became disabled and had to be sent home. He successfully attacked the Indian settlement, burning the dwellings and killing or capturing a number of the inhabitants. Rogers claimed to have killed 200 Indians and to have captured 20, but some authorities accept the French figure of 30 dead. It is unclear how many Indian warriors were present at the time of the raid, but large numbers swiftly assembled in pursuit of the rangers whose retreat became a nightmare. They were reduced to eating roots and cannibalizing the corpses of comrades when supply boats failed to appear at their rendezvous on time. Rogers lost almost half of his command of 200 on this expedition.

Rogers proved that he could penetrate Canada and destroy the Abenakis' sanctuary. The Abenakis' sense of security was badly shaken by the raid, but it is not always clear who "won" engagements of this sort. Lieutenant Colonel John Armstrong's raid on the Delaware village at Kittanning on the Allegheny River on 8 September 1756 was celebrated as an Anglo-American victory at the time. Armstrong caught an unfortified village by surprise, killed a prominent Indian military leader, and rescued a few prisoners. After the attack, the Indians abandoned Kittanning and withdrew across the Ohio. Indian morale seems to have suffered from this blow, which in turn lifted sagging Anglo-American spirits. On the other hand, although Armstrong enjoyed the advantage of surprise and a numerical advantage of three to one, casualties were roughly equal on either side and the bulk of the prisoners remained in Indian hands. Armstrong's raid failed to end the Indian threat to Pennsylvania's white frontier settlements. Armstrong had achieved qualified success, but the Indian combatants, whose primary concern was to avoid loss of life, could also claim victory. As we will see, Europeans and Indians often defined victory by different standards.[2]

European "invasions" of America

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the period covered by this study, Indians in eastern North America conducted a protracted and often successful military resistance against what many historians now perceive to have been a series of European invasions of North America.[3] Armed resistance against English settlement began in Virginia in 1607 and ended in the "Old Northwest" only after the defeat of an allied British-Indian confederate army by United States General William Henry Harrison at the battle of the Thames Fallen Timbers in 1813. During this time, Europeans fought Europeans for the

1. Seventeenth-century eastern North America

control of an American "empire". Britons, French, Spaniards, Canadians, and Americans became involved in conflicts which increasingly resembled the conventional war practised in Europe. Indians fought on all sides of these conflicts for reasons of their own and played varying roles of central and marginal importance. However, when Europeans confronted Indians, it was usually within the context of frontier warfare, a kind of war in which the Indians were accomplished masters and in which the Europeans were frequently at a disadvantage. European officers found that if they were to be successful against Indian adversaries, it was best to have Indian allies. In retrospect, given the apparent European superiority in numbers, material and technology, it may seem surprising that Indian resistance lasted as long as it did. Europeans soon found that their apparent advantages did not guarantee success. They had a lot to learn about the ability of stateless native people to resist the advance of the most powerful, expansionist European empires.

Most successful in dealing with the Indians diplomatically and militarily were those who made an effort to understand them. But Europeans often avoided such an effort when they relegated the Indians to the status of "savages", a people without government, laws, social mores and cultural values. European conquest could thus be justified as a triumph of civilization over barbarism. Not surprisingly, Europeans tried to comprehend the Indians within a European context. New England Protestants' understanding of their Indian neighbours was inevitably influenced by the religious struggles of the seventeenth century. A "godless" people outside the law of European society was automatically suspect. Still worse from the point of view of these Protestants were those Indians who came under the influence of Jesuit missionaries. Their satanic nature was thus confirmed. This perspective was central to the development of Protestant Anglo-American historiography, which celebrated English conquest and settlement as the inevitable and benign march of progress. This tradition reached its apogee in the nineteenth century in the works of Francis Parkman and held sway among professional historians at least through the first half of the twentieth.[4] Indeed, despite the best efforts of revisionists, Parkman will probably influence the American popular historical tradition for some time to come.

Canadian writers have found Parkman's perspective rather less satisfactory. But they too have often defined the Indians from the standpoint of their own culture without dealing with the Indians on their own terms.[5] Historians of both societies have often written to advance their own agendas. Much of the history written by the heirs of a European conquest inevitably celebrates it and justifies it. The North American Indians, losers and lacking academic historians of their own, were denied a voice.

Recent scholarship on these issues has occurred within a changed context. Developments such as multiculturalism, the struggle for minority rights, the Native American movement, and the end of the era of European imperialism have challenged the old elites in North American society and the historical tradition that supports them. New scholarly methodologies applying anthropological techniques to historical studies have advanced understanding of and appreciation for the non-literate cultures of the past. Indian peoples have thus emerged as three-dimensional people to be understood within their own context and upon their own terms, free from the traditional stereotypes of noble or ignoble savage, images refracted through the lenses of European culture. Although the new context is hardly free from bias (the challenge to the old elites being central to the current “culture wars” in North America), the nature of the Indian resistance to the European conquest of North America is the subject of more informed and sympathetic investigation.[6]

This is a story that goes far beyond military history. Military conflict was only one aspect of a clash of cultures and the adaptation of one culture to another. Military institutions do not exist in a vacuum; European—Indian military conflict was but one element in a complex set of contacts and exchanges between the peoples of North America. Indeed, war may have been the least important vehicle of European conquest. Epidemic diseases killed far more native people than did muskets or cannon and undermined the resistance of many tribes. Estimates of the North American Indian population in 1492 range from 1 to 12 million. Most scholars despairing at incomplete demographic data seem to split the difference between the two figures. The prevailing view is that waves of European epidemic diseases devastated Indian communities to the extent that European soldiers engaged in something of a mopping-up action. Although the relationship between disease, the cataclysmic collapse of Indian population levels and European conquest has recently been questioned, individual cases seem to bear it out.[7] For example, estimates of the New England Indian population before European colonization range from 72,000 to 126,000–144,000. By 1670, on the eve of King Philip’s War, according to one estimate that number had been reduced to 8,600. Europeans suffered from disease too, but by 1670 their number was over 50,000.[8] The populations of both the Hurons of modern Ontario and the Iroquois of northern New York were cut in half by epidemic diseases by 1640. Among the Great Lakes Indians in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there were population declines ranging from 25 to 90 per cent. A visitor to the Carolina Piedmont at the beginning of the eighteenth century found the remains of whole towns destroyed by smallpox. It was simply the most recent in a wave of epidemics which had beset the region from the earliest contacts with the Spanish in the sixteenth century.[9] As will become

evident, population disparities contributed to European-Indian conflict and to the ultimate success of white conquest.

Disease paved the way for non-military agents of conquest. The arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the Huron country in 1634 coincided with the outbreak of a series of epidemics that reduced the population by half in six years. Jesuit immunities appeared to demonstrate the power of their religious message when Indian rituals and medical practices proved helpless in the face of disease. Jesuit missionaries successfully capitalized on a people weakened and demoralized by these disasters. Puritan missionaries in New England found the majority of their converts among those Indians most stricken by epidemics. The Massachuset tribe, reduced from 24,000 to 750 by 1631, provided many "praying Indians", while the Narragansetts, unaffected by the epidemics, remained resistant to the appeal of Christianity and even experienced a revival of native religious belief.[10] Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries conducted campaigns to alter Indian cultural life to conform with European practices. The Jesuits were willing to go farther afield than their Protestant rivals and were more skilful in adapting their message to the native cultural context, but as one scholar has observed:

> The Jesuits' reputation for tolerance and willingness to adapt Christianity to the traditions of their converts is deserved, but only in comparison with other seventeenth century missionaries. At bottom, they and other Catholic priests followed in less extreme form the doctrine that English ministers called "civility before sanctity": only when Indians shed their native ways and adopted European customs could they truly become Christians.[11]

While missionaries transformed the lives of some Indian peoples, they created deep divisions in communities which were riven between converts and traditionalists. Consensus decision-making processes were undermined, elders lost influence, and the community lost the ability to respond to crises with unity. Factions among the Hurons in the wake of Jesuit missionary success sapped their ability to meet the Iroquois onslaught of the 1640s which destroyed their independence as a people.[12] For a variety of reasons French missionary activity among the Iroquois after 1667 was less successful in registering permanent gains, but their influence also resulted in divided communities. Conflicts between non-Christians and Christians in the late 1660s and the 1670s resulted in a large emigration of the latter to settle in the mission community of Caughnawaga in the St Lawrence River Valley.[13] Catholic Iroquois would prove valuable allies of the French in decades to come.

Jesuit missionaries possessed greater leverage with the Hurons than the Iroquois because they controlled the former’s access to European trade goods and firearms. The Iroquois had alternative sources. During the seventeenth century, the eastern Indians of North America had become part of the worldwide economic system, a fact that transformed native economies, introduced material conveniences such as metal tools and woolen blankets, and rendered the Indians dependent upon European commercial policies and market forces. Indian rivalries and Indian—European relations became governed by the European demand for furs. One scholar argues that the fur trade was by its nature an unequal exchange which extracted wealth from the margins, the North American forests, to the benefit of the European centre.[14] This may have been true in macroeconomic terms, but clearly many Indians saw profit in the trade. While unscrupulous white traders sometimes used alcohol to take advantage of their Indian partners, other Indian traders showed that they had a shrewd idea of the value of their wares. Furthermore, the extent to which the trade disrupted the traditional Indian way of life seems to have varied. The leading expert on the Algonquian peoples of the Great Lakes Region finds that by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the trade had caused little disruption of the native subsistence system. European items had more symbolic than material significance and the trade itself was conducted by the French more from diplomatic than commercial motives.[15] However, Indian economies which were deeply integrated into the fur trade were vulnerable to market changes. Demand for beaver pelts collapsed after 1660, causing a decline in the value of wampum, a fur-backed shell currency. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, southern New England Indians were pressured to sell land to pay their debts to English merchants. Tensions over land sales were a principal cause of the outbreak of King Philip’s War in 1675. Indian peoples responded to the trade in ways which reflected their unique contexts. The Hurons, who had long traded with the hunting peoples of the north, were natural traders. The Iroquois, surrounded by peoples with similar economies, had little experience with trade and turned to war to increase their access to furs.[16]

The most baleful product of European commercial contact with North American Indians was alcoholism. Indeed, the Indian addiction to alcohol may be called America’s first drug epidemic. All fair-minded contemporary observers lamented the unusual vulnerability of the Indian peoples to alcohol. The Swedish naturalist Peter Kalm believed that brandy had killed more Indians than war or smallpox: “A man can hardly have a greater desire of a thing than the Indians have for brandy. I have heard them say that by drinking brandy was a desirable and an honorable death; and indeed it was a very common thing to kill themselves by drinking this liquor to excess.”[17] Within

this context, the military dimension of the European "invasion" seems rather insignificant. Weakened as they were, Indian warriors fought their adversaries almost to a standstill in eastern North America nearly to the end of the eighteenth century.

This contest was never simply one of European versus Indian. North American Indians were not a monolithic block. While some tribes relied upon traditional religious practices as a bulwark against the European threat, others converted to Christianity and in varying degrees adopted a European way of life. Christian Indians often served as loyal soldiers in European forces and many non-Christian Indians entered into alliance with Europeans for reasons of their own. Lack of unity was a central weakness of Indian resistance to the expansion of white settlement.

The line between Indian and white settlement was never precise during the period of this study. European and Indian settlements were frequently in close proximity to one another and there was a great deal of peaceful interchange between the two peoples. Commerce and co-operation were as much parts of the European—Indian relationship as was war. Where ownership of land was not at issue, war was not inevitable. This was the case in Canada where Bruce Trigger concludes that "It is significant that not once was there a case of serious or prolonged conflict between Europeans and Indians living within the borders of Canada."[18] Viewed in this light, the traditional concept of the frontier as the advancing edge of civilization against savagery and darkness no longer has meaning. I use the term "frontier" in this work in two senses: first, as the zone in which the two cultures engaged one another in conflict and cooperation, and secondly and more importantly, as a form of warfare which was unconventional in the European sense, but which had its own inherent rules and methods. The Indians were the masters of this form of warfare. "The principles of their military action", observed the frontier veteran John Armstrong, "are rational, and therefore often successful.... In vain may we expect success against our adversaries without taking a few lessons from them".[19] Successful frontier soldiers did learn these lessons and, when they did, had indeed crossed a military frontier.

This book will also be concerned with the European soldiers who served as both opponents and allies of the Indians. They have been subject to caricature as often as have been the Indians. American nationalists have contrasted the image of the heroic frontier rifleman with that of the obstinate, inflexible, road-bound European regular. This is a stereotype as unconvincing as that of the "noble" or "ignoble savage". Professional European officers could and did learn to fight in the forest. Colonel Henry Bouquet, a Swiss officer in the British service recognized that his regulars were at a disadvantage in the woods:

> without a certain Number of Woodsmen, I cannot think it Advisable to employ regulars in the Woods against Savages, as they cannot procure any Intelligence, and are open to Continual Surprises, nor can they Pursue at any distance their Enemy when they have Routed them, and should they have the Misfortune to be Defeated the whole would be destroyed if above one day's March from a Fort.[20]

Yet Bouquet proved himself to be an able frontier commander. His force, consisting mainly of regulars, defeated an Indian army in the bitter two-day battle of Bushy Run in August 1763. Similarly, the American General Anthony Wayne, who often expressed contempt for frontier riflemen, won the climactic battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 by means of a bayonet attack.

When properly led, and used in the right combination with experienced woodland irregulars, European or Indian, the regulars were formidable troops. As in the case of Fort Bull, they could be counted upon to attack strongly defended positions and to follow orders unquestioningly. Troops recruited in the English colonies, referred to as Provincial by the British, usually possessed no special aptitude for forest warfare and experienced many of the same difficulties as their red-coated brothers in arms.

During the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, warfare in North America became increasingly Europeanized and, despite their formidable qualities as warriors, the role of the Indians became marginal to the outcome of the major conflicts. Seventeenth-century wars were small in scale compared to the great struggles of the eighteenth century: the War of the Spanish Succession (Queen Anne's War), the War of the Austrian Succession (King George's War), the Seven Years War (French and Indian War), and the War of American Independence. European settlers introduced muskets, cannon, and sophisticated fortification techniques into North America in the seventeenth century, but technology provided them with no special advantages over their Indian opponents in the conflicts of the era. During the eighteenth century, the scale of warfare dramatically expanded and European governments proportionally increased their commitment of military resources to the continent. The most important engagements of the climactic duel between Britain and France for North America in the Seven Years War involved operations against fortresses dominating strategic communications lines. Artillery, artillery fortification, siege warfare techniques, big gun warships on interior lakes, large armies of regulars dispatched directly from Europe, complex supply services, and sophisticated staff officers and engineers combined to transform North American warfare into something more closely resembling its European counterpart.[21] The War of American Independence only accelerated that transformation. This development did not guarantee that

Indian resistance to the expansion of European settlement would be overcome. The final defeat of resistance in 1813 was based upon a number of factors. First was the establishment of a unified United States and the reluctance of Great Britain to contest militarily American expansion into the Northwest. Second was divisions within the Indian confederacy itself and, third, was the emergence of able American commanders who understood and appreciated the strengths of Indian warriors and who developed the appropriate combination of troops and tactics.[22]

"Civilization" versus "savagery"

Traditionally, the moral context of frontier warfare has been portrayed as a conflict between civilization and savagery.[23] Recent scholarship has rejected that stereotype and has sought to understand certain Indian practices such as scalping, torture and cannibalism, so repellent to Europeans, within the context of native American culture. One important conclusion is that not all Indian societies engaged in all of those practices and that Indian attitudes towards them were subject to change. Revisionists also point to frequent European violations of their own moral standards. Some traditional frontier heroes have lost their lustre and some villains their edge. Thus George Rogers Clark, the famous warrior of the Northwest frontier during the American War of Independence has emerged in recent historical writing as a coarse, brutal, ambitious figure whose violent acts were at least as reprehensible as those of his Indian opponents defending their homes and hunting grounds.[24] Clark adopted the Indian style of war as his own and did not hesitate to scalp Indian prisoners within sight of an enemy garrison to hasten its surrender. James T.Axtell has written that Clark's "exploits in the streets of Vincennes added a chilling new chapter in scalping's long and bloody history".[25]

The issue of moral responsibility in war is timeless and complex. Current guidelines rest largely upon historical precedent and thus the behavior of men such as Léry, Robert Rogers, and George Rogers Clark have contemporary relevance. Indeed Clark himself and his superior, Governor Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, accused Clark's opponent, the British commander Henry Hamilton, of war crimes in language suggestive of the Nuremberg charges. Moral issues present a special challenge for the historian. Throughout Western history one may point to certain moral traditions that have commanded respect in wartime, for example the belief that prisoners and non-combatants should not be harmed. Failure to observe such conventions, such as Henry V's order to kill the French prisoners at Agincourt, alarmed contemporaries as well as historians in succeeding generations. Perhaps these values transcend

specific cultures and are common to all humanity. That is certainly implied by the Nuremberg principles. Nevertheless, historians must also be aware of context and the need to avoid anachronism. Recent scholars have been careful to evaluate Indian military behavior within the context of native American culture. This is a fair approach and one which I shall adopt. Unfortunately, some revisionists have rescued the Indians from traditional caricatures only to demonize their European opponents. It is perhaps easier to assume that, unlike native Americans, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans shared modern Western moral values and to judge them harshly when they departed from them. But I believe that the historian, if he renders moral judgement, should be sensitive to two levels: his own moral sensibility and that of the historical actors who inhabited very different moral universes. We cannot understand the actions of New England Puritans or southern slave owners until we attempt to see the world through their eyes. We must be aware of their moral standards and the extent to which they conformed to or departed from them.

The issue of moral responsibility in frontier warfare becomes even more complex when one considers that there was no clear line between European and Indian cultures. The story is as much one of cultural exchange as one of conflict. Thus, how is one to differentiate between the behaviour of Christian and non-Christian Indians? Presumably, conversion to Christianity meant that Indians had acquired Christian moral values. But many Indians may have accepted Christianity as an accommodation with a superior power while retaining the fundamental beliefs of their native culture which shaped their conduct in war. By what standard should they be held accountable? Similarly, successful European frontier warriors such as Clark adopted the Indian way of war without conceding their European identity. What is one to make of his practice of scalping opponents?[26] As Michael Walzer has pointed out, war defies the easy application of both moral and strategic judgements. All of the combatants in the frontier wars tried to win but often blundered. Most subscribed to some form of moral standard, but frequently fell short of the mark. These warriors were not saints; rather they were complex human beings, often operating under the extreme emotions of fear and anger. The historian's duty is to understand them before judging them.

Military historians have the luxury of enjoying the study of events which inflicted death and destruction on countless numbers of innocent people. Nevertheless war remains central to the human condition. It does settle things, in this case the control of eastern North America. Had European commanders in the second half of the eighteenth century studied the military history of American warfare in the preceding decades, perhaps they might have settled the issue sooner. Commanders' disregard of costly lessons is one of the