

THE FRONTIER WAR FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE¹

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The frontier war for American Independence, at once genocidal and decisive, is obscured within the American Revolution's broader history and even more powerfully vivid and enduring myths. But the largely conventional war along the eastern seaboard was paralleled and at times intersected by a war without mercy along the frontier. Battles won or lost there could and did decide the revolution's fate. Indeed, the most critical campaign of not just the frontier but the entire war took place in 1777, when the Americans captured an entire British army at Saratoga. That encouraged France to ally with the United States in 1778 and made possible Washington's capture of another British army at Yorktown in 1781. This article explores the strategies, tactics, diplomacy, logistics, participants, cultures, and psychologies of America's frontier war for independence.

Keywords: frontier, America, independence, frontier war, strategies, tactics, diplomacy, logistics, participants, American Revolution

*«Great things have been affected by a few Men well Conducted»
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«The Americans...acquire no attachment to Place: But wandering about Seems engrafted to their Nature: and it is a weakness...that they Should forever imagine the Lands further off are Still better than those upon which they have already settled» © Lord Dunmore

«It is also your Business, Brothers, to exert yourselves in the Defense of this Road by which the King, our Father, so fully supplied our Wants. If this is once stopt we must be a miserable People, and be left exposed to the Resentment of the Rebels, who, notwithstanding their fair Speeches, wish for nothing more than to extirpate us from the Earth, that they may possess our Lands, the Desire of attaining which we are convinced is the Cause of our present War between the King and his disobedient Children» © Seneca Chief Sayengaraghta

Most Americans know little about the frontier war for their nation's independence. That struggle is overshadowed by such stirring events as Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, the Declaration of Independence, the

¹ This fragment of the book by William Nester «Frontier War for American Independence». Stackpole Books, 2004, is published with permission of the author.

Delaware River crossing, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, and national icons like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin. But the largely conventional war along the eastern seaboard was paralleled and at times intersected by a racial war without mercy along the frontier.

Frontier warfare was vicious. Sometimes accompanied by British officers but more often acting alone, the Indians launched hundreds of raids along nearly the entire frontier from Maine to Georgia, seeking to pillage, destroy, enslave, and kill. That viciousness was not one-sided. The Americans could be just as brutal as the «savages» they loathed and feared. Of the Indians killed during American campaigns into the wilderness, most were women, old men, and children who could not get away or believed that as noncombatants and, in at least one case, Christians, they would be spared. The Americans condemned atrocities by the British and their Indian allies while turning blind eyes and deaf ears to any rumors of those committed by their own side.

But the frontier war was more than a long, blood-soaked sideshow. The Americans won independence when and how they did because of three interrelated successes of diminishing yet vital importance. It was essential for American conventional armies to stay in the field in every region along the eastern seaboard, evading and ideally defeating British offensives and shadowing the redcoats holed up in the cities they managed to capture. But the vitality of those patriot armies depended on foreign sources of money, munitions, and men, especially the latter; the French alliance would eventually provide the fleet and army that allowed the Americans to win their independence sooner rather than later. First, however, the French had to be convinced that they would be backing a winning cause, which returns us to the frontier war.

Battles won or lost there could and did decide the revolution's fate. Indeed, the most decisive campaign of not just the frontier but the entire war took place in 1777 when British armies embarked from Montreal, Oswego, and New York City to converge on Albany. In a half-dozen bloody wilderness battles and sieges, the Americans eventually forced the British and Indian army launched from Oswego to retreat and captured General John Burgoyne's 5,500 man army at Saratoga. Learning of Burgoyne's fate, the third expedition withdrew to New York City. Had those British offensives succeeded, there would have never been a French alliance and the decisive surrender of yet another British army at Yorktown in 1781.

But Yorktown depended on more than the 1777 wilderness victories. The crushing American destruction of British forces at the frontier battles of King's Mountain in October 1780 and Cowpens in January 1781 drastically diminished the numbers and exposed the western

flank of General Edward Cornwallis's army, which had overrun Georgia and South Carolina. Had the British won those battles, they would have secured their rule over those two southern states with nothing more than small bands of patriot guerrillas to fight. Faced with overwhelming numbers, General Nathaniel Greene would undoubtedly have withdrawn into Virginia rather than stand at Guildford Court House in February 1781, where his troops destroyed a quarter of Cornwallis's army and forced the British to retreat to Wilmington. When Cornwallis did invade Virginia later that summer, he did so with an army sadly reduced in ranks and élan by three defeats. He also turned his back on Greene's army that would eventually liberate the Carolinas and Georgia. While the French fleet ultimately empowered Washington to force the British surrender at Yorktown, Cornwallis would have never holed up there if he had not suffered his earlier defeats.

The frontier campaigns and battles of 1777, 1780, and 1781 were decisive in determining the American Revolution's fate. Yet the importance of what happened along those thousands of miles of wilderness and scattered forts, hamlets, and homesteads does not end there. American failures elsewhere would mire the new nation in military, economic, and diplomatic conflicts that persisted for decades. The Americans would have captured Canada in 1775 had they not been so ineptly led on the Lake Champlain frontier; the subsequent expulsion of the British from all their colonies except Nova Scotia would at the very least have set back the attempted reconquest's timing and strategy and might have inspired the powerful peace faction in Parliament to form a government. Likewise, a series of events favoring American interests would have accrued had General John Sullivan's campaign taken Fort Niagara in 1779. Lightly defended, Detroit and smaller posts would have surrendered to an American expedition moving up the Great Lakes. Most northwest tribes would have buried the hatchets, and raids against the Ohio valley settlers would have diminished to a trickle. With that region secure, diplomats could have been assertive rather than timid in demanding trade rights down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Those are just two of many «what ifs» that illuminate the frontier war's importance to subsequent American history.

The frontier war, at once genocidal and decisive, is obscured within the American Revolution's broader history and even more powerfully vivid and enduring myths.

A significant portion of the American Revolution was fought and thought over lands called the frontier, but what was the frontier during America's independence struggle? The frontier was any wilderness or sparsely peopled region where groups struggled for control. There was not

one frontier but many, and they were determined as much by culture as by nature.

Amorphous frontiers thus should not be confused with clear-cut boundaries. Among other issues, that era's diplomats negotiated lines on maps that separated people. Nearly every treaty with Indians either reaffirmed or redrew boundaries. Yet it is one thing to scratch mutually accepted lines on maps and quite another to keep people from straying across or struggling for them.

Where then did the frontier begin or end? Was it that last hamlet or homestead or somewhere in the wilderness beyond? By definition, the frontier was fluid. It shifted with the fortunes of war, trade, diplomacy, harvest, or hunt, and the ambitions and fears that at once shaped and reflected those enterprises. Nothing punched back a frontier more swiftly than terror. Traumatized and enraged refugees stampeded from every frontier war. Many stayed away forever. Some threw experience and caution to the winds and headed west again along with hopeful others once the scalping knives were sheathed.

Geographically, the frontiers embraced the piedmont of the Carolinas and Virginia; the tidewater regions of East and West Florida; Georgia south and west of Sunbury; Maine north and east of Falmouth; the upper reaches of the St. Lawrence, Connecticut, Hudson, Mohawk, Delaware, Susquehanna, Ohio, Wabash, Illinois, Cumberland, Tennessee, Savannah, Broad, Catawba, Peedee, and Cape Fear Rivers; the Mississippi River valley from above New Orleans to its headwaters, the cluster of settlements in the hearts of Tennessee and Kentucky; the villages near Detroit, Michilimackinac, Niagara, Vincennes, Kaskaskia, St. Joseph, and other remote forts; the entire watersheds of Lake Champlain and the Great Lakes; most of Nova Scotia; and countless other lone villages and cabins buried within or near wilderness.

Culture was as important as geography in shaping passions and actions in the frontier war for American independence. Though most tribes sided with the British against the land-grabbing Americans, every tribe and village was split in varying degrees and ways over what to do about the war. The Americans were just as splintered by ethnicity, class, and, most importantly, the degree of loyalty or defiance to the king and all he symbolized. The frontier war was fought not just between settlers and Indians, but within each of those cultures.

Indians had fought Indians ever since they first arrived in the Western Hemisphere and continued to do so long after the Europeans joined them. They killed each other for the same reasons that have motivated war for all peoples at all times and places--greed, fear, pride, hatred, vengeance, and ignorance. What changed was the context. Tribal

struggles became subordinated within the broader conflicts among the technologically and economically superior European powers and later with the Americans.

Indians were not the helpless victims or pawns of the Europeans. Tribal interests were just as clearly defined and followed as those of European states. To advance their interests, Indians were as adept at manipulating the power imbalance as the Europeans, perhaps more so. Indian diplomacy followed a time-honored maxim, «The enemy of my enemy is my friend». A tribe leaned toward the imperial power whose restless pioneers were the fewest, least intrusive, and farthest away.

Thus did most tribes tilt with varying degrees toward the weaker power, France, during its century-and-a-half struggle with Britain for mastery over North America's eastern half. In so doing, some tribes helped preserve and even enhance themselves, most merely slowed their decline, and a few were completely «extirpated». The tribes lost this advantage when Britain drove the French from North America in 1763. Then a dozen years later America's independence struggle revived the Indian ability to play one power against the other. The American settlers posed the greater immediate threat if not the greater military and economic power, so most tribes naturally favored the British.

But other forces complicated this seemingly clear-cut decision. Geography, trade, culture, and dependence were inseparable for all tribes. Relations with the British and Spanish empires were both a blessing and curse. The closer the Indians were to the settlements, the easier it was to trade and counsel in peace, or rip scalps and plunder in war. Or, conversely, the easier it was to suffer alcoholism, epidemics, poaching, squatting, and cultural leprosy at any time, along with the specter of enemy invasion in war.

A tribe's degree of economic dependence, more often than not, determined its allegiance. The Iroquois or Six Nations provide a good example. The prosperity of the Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga tribes was tied to Fort Niagara while that of the Mohawk, Oneida, and Tuscarora tribes was anchored on Albany. Thus in war the western tribes leaned first toward France, and then Britain while the eastern tribes rallied first around Britain, and then America.

Yet even here there were exceptions. During the American Revolution, the Mohawks were mostly loyal to Britain despite the isolation of their two villages, Fort Hunter and Canajoharie, within a checkerboard of settlements. Their ties to their adopted sachem, Sir William Johnson, and, after his death in 1774, his son John and nephew Guy, kept them loyal despite their exposed position. A personal bond explains the Oneidas' allegiance as well. For the Oneidas it was the charisma and genuine love of

their missionary Samuel Kirkland rather than their proximity to the settlements that knit them with the Americans against not just the British but also the other Iroquois tribes.

To use the word «tribe» is to substitute convenience for accuracy. Villages more than tribes shaped Indian identities. The idea of being a Shawnee or Iroquois was as abstract as living at Piqua or Genesee was concrete. Yet villages were little less diverse than tribes. Most were polyglot jumbles of not just clans but also dialects and even languages and races. Unlike whites, Indians saw strength in genetic and racial diversity rather than uniformity. Captives were adopted. Fragments of other peoples were enticed to join. Villages or even tribes depleted by disease or war meshed. In such social flux, individualism, consensus, equality, and tolerance became essential values that let Indians get along with one another. There is certainly irony here. In the colonial world of religious conformity, class conceits, and steep slippery slopes for the ambitious up the economic, social, and political hierarchy, few Americans ever realized those very same abstract values that motivated and justified their own revolution.

So what kept liberty from dissolving into anarchy? Indian society lacked (and did not want) such formal institutions as laws, courts, prisons, and police to keep order. Instead, a village modified behavior by socializing individuals into its values and reinforcing those teachings by wielding group approval or condemnation as appropriate. And each village or tribe had a government that made vital decisions on its behalf. The organization and power of those governments varied. Many tribes had separate chiefs for civil and military decisions. Some tribes had a head chief, others a council of chiefs with similar status.

How did one become a chief? More so than among the Europeans, Indians rose within their world by their merits. Those who became chiefs did so because they displayed outstanding diplomatic, political, oratorical, and war skills. As long as they stayed sober, most chiefs displayed highly sophisticated negotiating skills during councils with the whites.

Chiefs reigned rather than ruled. They gained status by giving away rather than amassing wealth, by forging consensus rather than issuing commands. Sir Guy Johnson explained that «the Authority of their Sachems...is not...coercive...It consists in the Power of Convening the People, and proposing matters to them, for their Compliance, the Success of which much depends upon their Influence, and the Strengths and Reputation of their Connexions» (Hamilton, 1952, p. 321). A consensus on even the simplest of issues could take days of debate and compromise to forge. Agreement was sometimes elusive, especially for tough questions of

war or peace. When differences were unbridgeable, a chief might lead his followers away to join another village or form his own.

A village or tribal council declared war for the same general reasons that a European state would--the desire to defend or expand trade, territory, and honor, or take plunder and vengeance. Yet the similarities ended there. No chief could command the men to go to war. That was a purely individual choice shaped by the push of society and the pull of charismatic, skilled leaders. Indians trod the war path as much for personal glory as village interests. Men rose or fell in status, wealth, and power by their relative feats or failures at war. War was so integral to many men's lives that they could do nothing else when it beckoned. Oujantanon Chief Forgeron explained: «Why should not I go to war. I am old. I am too lame to be able to run away. War is my vocation, I had rather after my death have the flesh torn off the bones by wild beasts, than that it should lie to rot idly in the ground» (Barnhart, 1951, p. 137).

Chief Forgeron was actually a rarity among Indians. Most warriors buried their hatchets after youth faded into middle age unless the enemy attacked their village. Perhaps 150,000 Indians lived between the Appalachians and Mississippi River and the Gulf Coast and Hudson Bay during the 1770s. Only a fraction of those peoples were active warriors at any one time. The best estimates at midcentury counted about 12,000 warriors north and 14,000 south of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers. Those warriors offered potentially decisive power to the side that could enlist them. But only a sliver of those men would actually trod the war path at any one time. The number of men a village sent to war depended on its fighting strength, the charisma and previous war experiences of those calling for followers, how relatively unified or divided the council was on the war, its distance from the settlements, its relative prosperity or poverty, and whether it was hunting season (Steven, 1984, 1:72-151).

Indian participation in the war was not inevitable. When news spread that the American «sons» had revolted against their English «father,» most Indians preferred to avoid that tragic family quarrel. And at first the Americans and British encouraged that neutrality. But with each failed attempt to crush the rebellion, ever more British officials recognized that Indian allies could be an enormous strategic asset. By late 1775, British officers and agents began presenting the war belt at Indian councils. Their American counterparts soon followed suit. Each warrior, village, and tribe had to make a very hard decision.

Most Americans were just as torn over which side to choose. In 1775, the rapid succession of news of Lexington and Concord, Boston's siege, the capture of Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point, and Bunker Hill split asunder public sentiments like a burning sword thrust. Americans

would fight not just British regulars and Indians, but often their neighbors as well. During the war over 30,000 loyalists enlisted in the British army or various provincial companies and regiments; perhaps 80,000 loyalists eventually went into exile. Nonetheless, John Adams's belief that the American people divided into roughly equal thirds as supporters, opponents, and fence-sitters during the struggle understated the Revolution's actual support. Overall, active patriots comprised around 40 to 45 percent of white males, while loyalists were between 15 and 20 percent. The proportions varied considerably among regions, religions, and ethnic groups (Calhoun, 1994, pp. 247-259).

What motivated the rebels against the King? Why did others assert their loyalty? What about those whose choice was to avoid a choice? Each man then alive could cite his own unique reasons. But of course those all boiled down to how each defined and acted upon his self-interest.

Loyalties among frontier settlers splintered as sharply as those along the eastern seaboard. The economic interests of most settlers tended to elbow aside sentiment in determining who was a Patriot, who was a Tory, and who struggled to sidestep a decision. But frontier politics did not necessarily crack along traditional class lines. A successful rebellion would nullify the Proclamation of 1763 and other treaties restricting westward expansion. Those already holding secure titles to their land tended to be more conciliatory than those whose claims violated British law. Patriots flourished in counties and settlements with shakier or nonexistent land titles. One's relative voice in the colonial assembly, rather than one's wealth, was also important. Those assemblies like Virginia's, which divvied out seats fairly equitably to the frontier settlers, preserved their loyalty; those like the Carolinas' and New York's, in which eastern landowners and merchants monopolized power alienated a good portion of frontiersmen into neutrality or Tory ranks. Frontier communities dependent on the guns and pay of nearby British garrisons tended to stay loyal. Ancestry also played a role. The deeper the number of generations that a family was rooted in the New World, the more likely it identified itself as American rather than British. Newcomers to the frontier tended to settle with neighbors similar to those they left behind. The frontier resembled a tattered patchwork quilt of varying ethnic and religious communities, each with its own relative sentiments or animosities toward the crown.

Aware that the Americans were developing a nationality and interests distinct from those of Britain, the crown trapped itself in a dilemma, from the 1763 Treaty of Paris ending French power in North America to the shots at Lexington Green in April 1775. Many prominent Britons were torn over the acquisition of Canada. For over 150 years the French threat had forced the ever more numerous and prosperous

Americans to stay dependent on British protection. With the French threat destroyed, Britain's leaders worried that the Americans would eventually seek autonomy and perhaps even independence. But the measures Whitehall took to contain American nationalism actually nourished it.

Nonetheless, though inconvenienced or offended by the Crown's policies, many people were as lukewarm about the patriot as they were the Tory cause. They became ropes in a tug-of-war between fervent Americans and British. To favor one side would offend the other. Retaliation could follow. To avoid that, one had to be a political weathervane, shifting with the prevailing winds. Surrendering conviction to expediency meant toasting Congress or King George, or even marching off into battle for a side one might otherwise detest. With the patriots dominant in most places, loyalists tended to lay dormant unless a British army marched into the region. It took almost suicidal courage to go against one's community if it cheered a particular cause.

In all, the patriots enjoyed an advantage. By nature they were more aggressive and demanding than most loyalists bowed before the Crown. This often gave them an appearance of power initially larger than their numbers. Their ranks then swelled from those who wanted to join the winning side or feared suffering with the losers. Thus did perceptions of power create power. But those who wielded power unjustly could undermine their legitimacy. To wage war, Congress and the states had to requisition supplies, money, and men even more voraciously than the Crown whose yoke they had thrown off. This alienated many of the «sunshine patriots» that Thomas Paine despised, and forced even the most committed radicals to pause for thought.

This vicious and devastating civil war was engulfed by the broader conflict of settlers versus Indians, leading Lord Dunmore to lament American wanderlust (Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 24, 1774, 1905). Dunmore's insight into American character was profound. No government could dam or even for long channel that «restlessness». The greed or dream of virgin land and wealth had fueled the frontier's advance for more than a century and a half and would continue to do so for more than another hundred years. That restlessness would destroy the grip of one government on its colonies and convert its successor into a global power. Living in the way of that expanding frontier were, of course, the native peoples.

There is irony here because Indians and settlers shared more characteristics than most were willing to admit. A hybrid culture developed along the frontier. The economies of settlers and Indians alike depended on subsistence farming supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering, along with the manufacture and repair of tools, furniture, and weapons. What little they did not consume was traded for goods that they could not

make themselves. Although most Indians and settlers retained their respective religions, their beliefs converged in many ways. Virtually all pioneers boasted their Christian faith in only one God while denouncing «savage» pantheism. Yet like the Indians, most settlers lived in a world shaped by the power of omens, dreams, healers, and spirits, and mingled many folktales and superstitions.

Imperialism loses some of its impetus in such a cultural dynamic. Though one people might be dominant, they must accommodate themselves to others on the frontier. In doing so, they transform themselves as well as their subjects. This cultural blending is more pronounced when a power balance checks two or more neighboring peoples. But those common practices and appearances should not be exaggerated. Ultimately, settlers and Indians superficially reflected each other from opposite edges of an unbridgeable cultural chasm.

The frontier war involved two distinct elements. Large-scale campaigns were mostly fought by regulars or volunteers, but often accompanied by Indians who served as guides, scouts, and flankers. Small-scale raids were mostly composed of Indians and sometimes joined by white officers and volunteers.

During that long war, the Americans and British each launched only one major campaign designed to burst through the frontier and conquer another province. Those campaigns were disasters. In the autumn of 1775, the Americans invaded Canada, with one prong under General Richard Montgomery advancing on Montreal and the other under General Benedict Arnold moving on Quebec. Montgomery captured Montreal and then joined Arnold before Quebec. But their New Year's Eve attack on that city was defeated and Montgomery was killed. Although the Americans gamely besieged Quebec that winter, they retreated back to New York before the 10,000 fresh redcoats who arrived in the spring. The Americans left behind nearly 5,000 dead and captured comrades. Britain's three pronged invasion of New York in 1777 ended even more ignominiously. Checked at Oriskany and Fort Stanwix, Colonel Barry St. Leger withdrew his army back to Fort Niagara, while General John Burgoyne's army was defeated at Bennington and Saratoga, and finally surrendered in October. Word of those defeats caused the third expedition up the Hudson River to turn back at Kingstown.

Each side's implementation of its strategies in North America nearly always fell short of its often grandiose goals. Warfare was tediously slow and laborious on the eastern seaboard. Those challenges were multiplied many times on the frontier. Logistics rather than gunfire defeated most wilderness expeditions. Gathering enough supplies and transport, and hacking a road through the forest were Herculean challenges and

sometimes Sisyphean traps. Packhorses had to carry their own fodder or perish on the trail. The longer the campaign, the more fodder the animals had to carry, and thus the less beans and bullets available for the troops. Low water or spring floods could retard an expedition by boat just as severely as a dearth of draft animals could doom one by land. When transport fell short of need, troops squatted in camp devouring provisions that were supposed to sustain them against the enemy.

The goal of most expeditions was modest: to destroy as much of the enemy frontier as possible and ideally push it back. Major General John Sullivan led the largest American campaign, 5,000 troops against the Iroquois in 1779. Although his army destroyed their villages, crops, and orchards, the inhabitants fled to fight, harvest, and procreate another day. In the Ohio valley the Americans embarked on a series of smaller expeditions. In distance if not manpower, no frontier campaign was more audacious than that of George Rogers Clark, who hoped eventually to capture Detroit and the upper Great Lakes after first taking British possessions in Illinois and along the Wabash River. But a dearth of men and supplies fouled Clark's grand design. Similar difficulties stymied the campaigns of General Lachlan McIntosh in 1778 and William Crawford in 1782 against the Ohio tribes. The most successful American campaigns were against the Cherokee whose villages were ravaged yearly from 1776 through 1781.

The British and Americans faced a dilemma regarding Indian allies. Nearly all frontier commanders and agents questioned whether warriors were worth the financial, diplomatic, emotional, and moral costs of enlisting and keeping them on raids and campaigns. Indians clearly provided advantages by performing such essential roles as guides, scouts, and flankers, ambushing enemy detachments, and capturing stray soldiers. Yet on the warpath frontier commanders often found themselves forced to follow Indian strategies and tactics rather than their own. General Frederick Haldimand complained in 1781 that «there is no dependence upon even those Indians who are declared in our favor, and there are a number in that country our avowed enemies...there has not been a single instance where the Indians have fulfilled their engagements but influenced by Caprice, a dream or a desire of protracting the war, to obtain presents, have dispersed and deserted the troops» (Haldimand to Clinton, September 29, 1781, 1781, 5:176). Under these conditions, the only thing worse than having Indians as allies was having them as enemies.

The decentralization and diversity of Indian politics bewildered and frustrated Europeans. They searched for a tribe that could make binding decisions for itself and others, and within each tribe tried to designate a head chief with whom to negotiate and forge binding agreements. These

efforts were not only often fruitless but also provoked further animosities. Nearly all Americans and British alike just could not fathom the reality that, as White Mingo and countless others tried to explain, chiefs were powerless to «restrain or hold fast our young men against their will» (White Mingo, October 18, 1776, 1776).

Indian diplomacy involved elaborate rituals. Councils opened with a condolence ceremony for those who had recently died. One side would wipe away the other's tears by symbolically reburying the dead with gifts to the survivors. With their minds and hearts cleared, delegates could then debate the council's issues. Wampum was an essential part of diplomacy. Bits of white or purple shell were laboriously transformed into hollow cylinders and then strung into strings or belts in patterns that displayed a pictorial or symbolic message. During councils a speaker would present strings or belts to emphasize his key points. Wampum holders also enjoyed diplomatic immunity. Envoys traveling through enemy country would prominently display a belt to avoid assassination. Wampum belts recorded a council's decisions or treaties.

Successful diplomats were those who had mastered the art of speaking the poetry of diplomatic language, enthusiastically and skillfully singing the songs and dancing the steps of war, listening carefully to the chiefs, gracefully accepting appropriate advice, acting decisively to prevent or compensate injustices committed both against and by Indians, and offering concessions to advance the long-term interests of one's nation.

But the most successful diplomats were usually those who were the most generous in distributing gifts. Indians were essentially practical people. Their loyalty usually went to the highest bidder. Gifts thus were essential to Indian diplomacy. The stronger always gave more to the weaker. Protocol demanded gifts on numerous occasions and situations. Gifts should be given annually, during any council, to cover the recent dead, to seal an alliance, to heal a rift, or to avert starvation and deprivation. A gift could come in many forms. The Indians not only expected generous amounts of goods, but also demanded interpreters, commissaries, military advisors, and blacksmiths.

The British and Americans rarely got a tangible return on their investments with the Indians. For instance, John Stuart, the British superintendent for the Southern District, gave away 7,500 pounds sterling worth of gifts in 1775, 14,500 in 1776, 33,000 in 1777, and 50,000 in 1778 (William Knox to Grey Cooper, April 27, 1779, 1972-82). Just how many warriors did those mounting piles of presents win for Britain? A pittance from the crown's point of view. During those four years only one tribe launched an all-out war against the Americans--the Cherokee in 1776, and it was defeated.

Truly great diplomats among the British or Americans were rare. The poison of British arrogance and American hatred seeped into diplomacy from all too many frontier officers and even agents charged with Indian affairs. As a diplomat, no one equaled let alone excelled Sir William Johnson, who died in 1774 on the war's eve. Unlike most diplomats, Johnson genuinely understood and sympathized with the Indians, mastered their psychology and culture, knew when to be tough or generous, and all along never wavered from advancing British interests. He would be irreplaceable.

Months and even years of painstaking expensive diplomacy that bought a tenuous peace could be shattered by an act of murderous rage. Impotent to retaliate against an elusive bloodthirsty foe, frontiersmen at times exploded their wrath on peaceful Indians. That usually just provoked the survivors' followers to swell the vicious cycle of death and destruction. The slaughter of Chief Logan's family and friends converted the Mingos into relentless avenging enemies. The butchering of Cornstalk united the Shawnee on the warpath. Less spectacularly but just as negatively, commanders tried to intimidate chiefs with threats and bluster. That might have cowed a few chiefs in the short run, but the Indians soon wised to the limits of American power. Over time the failure to respect Indian diplomatic etiquette swelled enemy ranks. American arrogance eliminated the most powerful Indian voices for neutrality--Cornstalk was murdered, Kayashuta seized the British hatchet, and White Eyes fell into a sullen acquiescence as ever more of his men joined war parties against the frontier and then was himself murdered.

For the Americans, the worst handicap on Indian policy was financial. Congress and the state governments were bankrupt; inflation made their currencies worthless. Yet even if they had enough money, they lacked access to inexpensive, abundant well-made, trade goods. Thus American diplomats and merchants alike were unable to do their jobs. As a result, nearly every tribe remained dependent on and thus allied with Britain rather than the United States.

But all that aside, the Indians understood that the ever swelling and land-hungry American population posed a worsening threat that only alliance with Britain could stave off. After all, not just the Americans fought for their independence. Every native people that went to war from 1775 to 1783 also fought to be free or simply survive. With that understanding most tribes contributed warriors or outright warred enthusiastically or half-heartedly, consistently or sporadically against the rebels between 1775 and 1783. Few tribes--Massachusetts' Mohican, New York's Oneida, and Maine's Penobscot, Maracheete, and Passamaquoddy Indians--openly allied with the United States during the war. No tribe on

either side would emerge victorious over the long term. Sooner or later they would all be crushed, whether they fought or fled.

Guerrilla rather than conventional tactics dominated the frontier war. Though such tactics were not unknown in Europe at that time, conventional warfare by professional armies prevailed. Although some expeditions numbered in the hundreds and even thousands of men, the wilderness war was fought mostly by raids of a score or so. The object was not so much to conquer as to create «no man's lands» by destroying or driving off the enemy's settlers. Frontier wars have no real fronts, but sputter and burst into flames here and there, though never everywhere at once (Malone, 1991).

This was a war in which the Indians enjoyed decided tactical and strategic advantages. Their warfare was adapted to the wilderness, which their ancestors had called home for thousands of years. They knew how to slip through the forest with little chance of detection, strike, and then disappear. Few Americans on the campaigns into Indian territory shared those skills, and their abilities were diluted by the hundreds of other armed men stumbling through the forest with them. With advanced word of an approaching enemy, the Indians either prepared an ambush or, more commonly, withdrew before the Americans arrived. Only one American expedition, Clark's against Vincennes in early 1779, achieved surprise, and that was against a British garrison rather than an Indian village.

Nonetheless, in addition to Clark, some masters of wilderness warfare emerged from the American and British ranks, like John Butler, Henry Bird, and Thomas Brown of the loyalists, and Daniel Boone, Evan Shelby, and John Sevier of the patriots, to cite only a few. Those men excelled because they created a hybrid of European and Indian tactics that gave them an edge.

Another Indian advantage stemmed from their relatively meager property and subsistence life. With less to lose, Indians tended to evade an approaching enemy. Unaware of just where the enemy was and weighed down with possessions, Americans preferred to fort up rather than flee. Thus, Indians were often able to destroy people along with their property, while the Americans could usually only burn houses and uproot crops.

But the glaring disparity in possessions was not always apparent. The troops in Sullivan's 1779 campaign against the Iroquois villages of the upper Susquehanna, Finger Lake, and Genesee valleys were astonished to find houses of squared logs, glass windows, stone fireplaces, and furniture, surrounded by orchards, fences, chickens and pigs rooting in the mud, and cattle lowing in the pasturelands. «Savages» were not supposed to enjoy such a lifestyle indistinguishable from that of Americans. Regardless, the

ability to destroy as much as they had suffered made the looting and burning all the more gleeful to those invaders.

Forest battles between war parties and large bodies of troops were rare. War parties attacked the weak and evaded the strong. When it was decided to attack, the warriors carefully assessed the enemy. Were they militia or regulars innocent of forest warfare? Were they hardened frontiersmen or rangers? How many were there and how were they deployed? Were they rested or tired? Were they wary or complacent?

The most vulnerable opponents, of course, were raw, exhausted, fearful recruits caught in an ambush. Then a quick rush of screaming, tomahawk-swinging warriors might panic and overwhelm them. If the troops were alert and took cover, then steady sniping, creeping, and encirclement might pick them off until they broke or surrendered. Well-trained regulars commanded by courageous officers might order a bayonet charge before which Indians always fled, but then usually swarmed back like so many deadly bees. Unless the Indians suffered large losses, ammunition usually decided the battle. When their powder and ball ran out, so too did the warriors.

Contrary to popular belief the Indians mastered not only wilderness tactics but also obedience to their leaders to realize them. Colonel James Smith, who spent four years as a captive with the Indians, revealed that on the war path «they have all the essentials of discipline. They are under good command, and punctual in obeying orders; they can act in concert; and when their officers lay a plan and give orders, they will cheerfully unite in putting all their directions into immediate execution» (Smith, 1870, p. 140). That discipline unraveled only when things went wrong. If the raiders suffered casualties or failed to overrun the enemy, warriors would lose heart and turn home.

Religion and warfare meshed for Indians. For protection, every warrior carried a medicine bundle that contained charms bestowed by the gods over the course of his lifetime. Each was different but might include «little figures of different kinds, some as Amulets, some as household Gods, these when they go to war they paint with vermillion». The most spiritually adept member of a war party guarded its medicine bundle with «heads, bones or skins of certain animals, preserved Birds in the feather, Snakes skins, Bows and arrows...to bundle up with the other valuable effects, Wolves teeth, Panthers claws, Eagles talons» (Barnhart, 1951, p. 127).

Dreams were the most easily trod path with the spirit world from which the gods gave messages: «Should anyone have a dream which bodes something favorable, or the contrary, he relates it in the morning to his comrades, and their reliance on omens is such, as frequently to defeat the

enterprise» (Barnhart, 1951, p. 122). That seeming fickleness frustrated most white officers accompanying war parties.

A war party's goal was to kill or capture as many people and destroy or plunder as much property as possible while suffering minimal or no losses. That would seem an obvious strategy for any numerically weaker side. But steadily diminishing Indian populations reinforced that imperative. Disease and battle were killing off Indians faster than they could naturally replenish themselves.

That population crisis provoked a quandary for war parties. Was it better to kill or capture more of the enemy? Tactical circumstances, of course, ruled that question. How much the enemy resisted, how vulnerable they were to slaughter, and how violent the victors' blood lust determined the degree of carnage.

In all, it was obviously easier for triumphant warriors to bring home a scalp than a captive. Yet for various reasons, most war parties aimed for a mix of the two. Prisoners could be more valuable than scalps, and not just when British officials paid more for them. Some captives could be converted into Indians. Children were the best candidates, but Indian life held enormous appeal to free spirits of all ages. Over the preceding century and a half, interbreeding and converts considerably lightened the skin tone of warriors stalking the settlements. Women and children were usually automatically adopted to replenish the village's population. A captive male's life, however, hung in the balance.

Males were forced to run the gauntlet between two opposing lines of jeering villagers armed with clubs and sticks. Many an exhausted prisoner stumbled, fell, and was beaten to death. Trader John Leeth witnessed Indians hack off and impale on a pole a captive's head amidst «a scene of yelling, dancing, singing, and rioting, which, I suppose, represented something like demons from the infernal regions». When Leeth and some other traders asked permission to bury the remnants, Wyandot Chief Half King replied, «They do not bury our dead when they kill them, and we will not bury theirs» (Thwaites, *A Short Biography of John Leeth: With His Account of His Life Among the Indians*, 1904, pp. 38-39).

Those who survived the gauntlet faced the judgment of the village elders, a grieving family, or the cries of the mob. The chiefs often allowed those families that had recently lost loved ones to decide the captive's fate. To assuage their loss, a family might tearfully embrace or fiendishly torture the prisoner, followed by the ritual cannibalism of organs and other body parts.

Those adopted rarely had it easy, at least initially. Captives struggled with mingled homesickness, rage, and terror. Villagers, including sometimes the adoptee's family, might bully the newcomer. Most men

sought escape at the first opportunity. But for some men, many women, and nearly all children, the longer they remained the more they preferred Indian to white life. Many tearfully refused to return to the settlements when a peace treaty forced tribes to release their captives.

How did the frontier war shape the Revolution? Although the Americans ultimately won independence on battlefields along the eastern seaboard and at negotiations in Paris and London, the frontier struggle was more than a bloody sideshow. That remote war diverted huge amounts of men, money, supplies, and energies from the east coast. It did so because both sides recognized the frontier's importance. The war's turning point, after all, took place on the frontier in 1777 when Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga and St. Leger broke off his siege of Fort Stanwix. The ability of pioneers to cling to tiny settlements in Kentucky and Tennessee, Clark's seizure of the Illinois villages and Vincennes, and Spain's capture of West Florida helped force the British to concede a United States that ended at the Mississippi River rather than the Appalachian watershed.

For the United States, the frontier war not only helped win independence and expand the new nation's territory, but also accelerated the development of American nationalism. That identity was forged in part by consciously contrasting it with the «savages» who impeded the nation's destiny. That view of Indians was succinctly captured in the Declaration of Independence, which charged the king with, among other crimes, provoking against the frontier «the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions».

That image not only promoted American national identity, but justified a ruthless series of policies and military campaigns to evict or at times extirpate Indians from their land. As if the «savages» were so «merciless,» the Americans could only fight fire with fire. On the frontier Americans and British alike often inflicted the same mayhem they condemned when committed by Indians.

The frontier war's most powerful immediate impact, of course, was on the people actually trying to survive there. For many of those settlers, the war was devastating and often deadly. Thousands of Americans and Indians alike were butchered or maimed; smallpox killed thousands more, mostly natives. Raiders from both sides destroyed an inestimable amount of the other's wealth--houses, livestock, crops, furniture, and various implements. To their dying days untold numbers of people were traumatized by the horrors and loss they survived.

Although they inflicted far more damage than they suffered, the Indians lost the war. That loss would become ever more crushing over the next generations as tens of thousands of settlers poured over the

Appalachians and spread across the land, shouldering aside the natives, clear-cutting the forests, and provoking yet more wars. But all that lay ahead. The war's immediate impact varied from one tribe, village, and individual to another. When the killing stopped, the Indians received the abstract news that their «Great Father» across the sea had ceded his power to a new one much closer to their homes. The new «Great Father» would soon reveal his nature.

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ВОЙНА ЗА НЕЗАВИСИМОСТЬ В США НА ФРОНТИРЕ¹

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Война независимость на фронтирной территории США, одновременно убийственная и разрушительная, остается скрытой от нас более широким спектром общих проблем истории Американской революции и еще сильнее яркими и живучими мифами об этой революции. Однако в основном традиционная модель войны вдоль восточного побережья сопровождалась параллельно войной без пощады вдоль линии фронта. Битвы, выигранные или проигранные там, могли и решали судьбу Революции. Действительно, самая критическая кампания не только фронта, но и всей войны состоялась в 1777 году, когда американцы захватили целую британскую армию в Саратоге. Это подтолкнуло Францию объединиться с США в 1778 году и сделал возможным захват Вашингтоном другой английской армии у Йорктауна в 1781. Эта статья исследует стратегии, тактику, дипломатию, логистику, участников, культуру и психологию фронтирной войны Америки за независимость.

Ключевые слова: фронт, Америка, независимость, война на фронтире, стратегия, тактика, дипломатия, логистика, участники Американской революции

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