The First Way of War

This book explores the evolution of early Americans’ first ways of making war to show how war waged against enemy noncombatant populations and agricultural resources ultimately defined Americans’ military heritage. Grenier explains the significance of Americans’ earliest wars with both Indians and Europeans, from the seventeenth-century conflicts with the Indians of the Eastern Seaboard, through the imperial wars among England, France, and Spain in the eighteenth century, to frontier Americans’ conquest of the Indians of the Transappalachian West in 1814. This sanguinary story of Americans’ inexorable march across the first frontiers helps demonstrate how they embraced warfare shaped by extravagant violence and focused on conquest. Grenier provides a major revision in understanding the place of warfare directed at noncombatants in the American military tradition, and his conclusions are relevant to understanding U.S. “special operations” in the War on Terror.

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The First Way of War

American War Making on the Frontier, 1607–1814

John Grenier
For Molly and Sophia
They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness*
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Preface

This book is an attempt to understand better the evolution of an early American way of war that condoned the use of violence against enemy noncombatants. As a serving officer in the United States Air Force, I have tried to focus on a larger audience than colonial historians. As such, I hope this book will encourage military professionals to think about the other sides of our martial culture. Military leaders should look at all the ways, even if they seem brutal and out of character, that we wage war. Similarly, there remains little doubt that a significant part of the future for the American soldier will involve the challenges, in their modern manifestations, that early American soldiers faced. Especially to my colleagues in the profession of arms, therefore, I suggest that relevant lessons abound in a study of early American military history.1

Attributing names to the various groups involved in the conflicts that shaped early American history is a difficult task. I have made an effort to distinguish systematically among the different participants in seventeenth-through early-nineteenth-century American wars. First, important differences existed among “Englishmen,” “Britons,” “Anglo-Americans,” and “Americans.” “Englishmen” refers to natives of England and Wales; I use “Britons” to describe the same peoples, together with the Scots, after 1707. “Anglo-American” describes Europeans born in England’s or Great Britain’s North American colonial possessions or those individuals who immigrated to North America. North American–born colonists or immigrants were not called “Americans” until the 1740s and generally did not think of themselves as such until after the War of Independence. However,

1 John M. Dederer has observed that the colonial era remains the least studied area of American military history: “the optimum word is relevance, or, to be more precise, a lack thereof. Many specialists of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American history seem to feel that there is little significance gained in studying seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century military affairs.” See Dederer, “Colonial Forces, 1607–1776,” A Guide to the Sources of United States Military History: Supplement IV, ed. Robin Higham and Donald J. Mrozek (New Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1998), 28.
rather than switch from “Anglo-American” to “American” when the narrative reaches the Revolutionary period, I use “American” to describe both creoles and immigrants before the War of Independence and the same groups after 1775. I use “English,” “French,” and “Spanish” to describe language groups, as well as the Old and New World subjects of their respective European monarchs. When referring to the native European inhabitants of New France, I employ “Canadian.” Naming the indigenous peoples of North America is even more difficult. “Native American” could apply to either indigenous peoples or any creole of the Americas. I prefer “Indian.” I have distinguished among Indian peoples by tribal designations, although those designations describe more linguistic than political differentiation.2 The specific names for Indian individuals present another bevy of choices. I have chosen to refer to them by the names by which Americans knew them. But in an attempt to honor their cultural identity, I have placed their Indian name, where possible, after the first citation of their English name. I have assigned places (forts, rivers, regions, etc.) the names their possessors gave them.

No less a problem than naming people and places is deciding to what degree to modernize or translate the prose and speech of seventeenth- through early-nineteenth-century English and French speakers. Authors, especially in their diaries and personal or public correspondence, rarely followed standardized rules of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Though their words carry a sense of the age in which they lived, I have opted to adopt the “Modernized Method” outlined in the Harvard Guide to American History to clarify obsolete spelling and erratic punctuation.3 I have translated most quotations taken from French primary sources, with only the occasional exception of short phrases or individual words that seem clear, into English.

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Last, but certainly not least, my love and thanks go to my wife, Molly, and my daughter, Sophia. I will never be able to express how much they have meant to me, and I thank them for the innumerable sacrifices they have made in supporting both my career in the Air Force and this book. It is to them that I dedicate all my efforts.
Abbreviations


DCB  Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

GHQ  Georgia Historical Quarterly.
Abbreviations


(O)IEAHC (Omohundro) Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA.

JAH *Journal of American History*.

JSAHR *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*.


LO Earl of Loudoun MSS, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.


MHSC *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*.


NEHGR *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*.

NSARM Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (formerly the Public Archives of Nova Scotia), Halifax.


Abbreviations


WMQ  William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser.

WO 34  Great Britain. War Office. Class 34 Papers.