
Book Reviews



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Army and Empire: British Soldiers on the American Frontier, 1758–1775.
By Michael N. McConnell. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8032-3233-0. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xix, 211. \$49.95.

The British Army in North America before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War is not a neglected subject. John R. Alden aroused modern interest with his 1948 biography of its commanding general, Thomas Gage, and Sylvia Frey as well as this reviewer have contributed studies of the army, its soldiers, and its mission. But one of the primary concerns of British leaders who made the decision in 1762–63 to break with historical precedent by maintaining a large, regular military force in mainland North America was the obvious need to secure the vast new territory acquired as a result of British victory in the Seven Years' War. Policing a presumably unfriendly French-Canadian population in the St. Lawrence valley would absorb a sizeable portion of that force, but a long frontier zone straggling from the Great Lakes through the Ohio and Mississippi valleys to the Gulf Coast and Florida peninsula posed a terrific challenge to British policy makers and military commanders on the ground. A great variety of Indian tribal groupings, many of them closely tied to the defeated and departing French and Spanish regimes, thinly populated this enormous area. Never adequately discussed by British authorities was the question of what small garrisons stationed at key points in the frontier zone might actually be expected to accomplish.

Michael McConnell takes us down to the level of daily life in these garrisons, and by careful research and clear exposition effectively answers the question. The great Indian war of 1763–64 demolished any idea that the garrisons could “defend” the frontier against Indian attack, and in its aftermath the smaller posts built by the French were abandoned. Another idea, pushed by a few British leaders and colonial officials, that military posts could become centers of regulation in the notorious Indian trade, and their garrisons could prevent migrating colonists from moving onto land claimed by

Indians—both missions intended to allay the kind of Indian grievances that had led to the 1763 war—also shattered itself on the physical realities of the frontier.

What McConnell shows beyond any doubt, in chapters on the frontier forts, social life, work, diet, and health, is that the troops had all they could do just to survive, keeping the rain off their heads and finding enough healthy bodies to mount guard on ever-crumbling ramparts. Evidence of daily garrison life is not as ample as one might expect. Best-documented by administrative correspondence is the constant—and costly—deterioration of poorly constructed and ill-sited fortifications. Rain, heat, snow, ice, and wind played hell with the wood, mud, and stone used to build the forts. British infantry lacked skilled workmen essential for timely repair and construction. The human side was not as well recorded, except in surviving personal letters and diaries. The author has located a few personnel reports buried in British archives for these regiments, and has combed colonial newspapers for mention of British soldiers. He is well informed on relevant work in social history and military archaeology.

This valuable monograph may be faulted on two points. First, in the unavoidable reliance on examples to illustrate general phenomena, the author relies too heavily on incidents drawn from the last few years of the war, 1758–64, when papers of field commanders like Henry Bouquet are littered with good stories, and the outbreak of peace had yet to dull the tone and content of periodic reports. Second, another chapter, on the human environment—the Indians and European civilians—who collected around each of these posts (more numerous at Detroit and Fort Pitt but present everywhere), and on how redcoats and their near neighbors interacted, would have rounded more fully an otherwise excellent book, placing it firmly on the growing shelf of new studies of the American frontier.

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Maritime Power and the Struggle for Freedom: Naval Campaigns that Shaped the Modern World, 1788–1851. By Peter Padfield. New York: Overlook, 2005. ISBN 1-58567-589-X. Maps and diagrams. Illustrations. Glossary. References and notes. Select bibliography. Index. Pp. xii, 451. \$35.00.

Researching and writing history and getting it published is a big job, a tremendous accomplishment (to some degree regardless of its quality); for an author to have almost a score of books on historical subjects—plus four novels—gracing the shelves of both institutional and personal libraries around the world almost defies the understanding of a mere mortal. This is what the renowned maritime historian Peter Padfield can see when he surveys his life's work to date. Moreover, as a rule, his titles—at least in the area of history and biography of historical figures—have received deservedly