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Introduction by Matt Schumann

**Eliot A. Cohen. *Conquered into Liberty: Two Centuries of Battles Along the Great Warpath That Made the American Way of War.*** Free Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780743249904 (hardcover, \$30.00); 9781451624113 (paperback, \$17.00).

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Introduction by Matt Schumann, Eastern Michigan University

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In this, the latest contribution to a rich historiography on the foundations of the American way of war, Eliot Cohen challenges us to consider the history of one particular theatre--the great warpath going up from New York City along the Hudson River-Lake Champlain corridor past the trading town of Albany and Iroquois longhouses at Onondaga, stretching down to the area of Montréal in what was originally French Canada, and farther still down the St. Lawrence River to Québec and beyond. An avenue both for trade and conquering armies, the region stands out as a site where both empires (British, French, American) and military cultures (European, Amerindian) collided.

Cohen appropriately opens his introduction with a study of terrain. With vivid language he illustrates how the route between Montréal and Albany, in particular, may have had the appearance of a riverine artery, but in fact it was more of a cesspool. The waterways, he notes, presented a host of challenges for unfamiliar sailors, and the broken, wooded terrain that surrounds them offered an environment unfriendly, at best, to soldiers in the Western tradition seeking European-style battles. Upon this canvas, Cohen strives to paint a picture of Western warfare at the edge of empire, brushing up against an Amerindian way of war to inform a distinctive American military culture.

His illustration involves eight "conventional" military actions, from the Schenectady raid of 1690 (chapter 1) to the siege of Fort Carillon in 1758 (chapter 4) to the naval engagement at Plattsburgh in 1814 (chapter 9), and includes reflections on the region's "shadow campaigns" during the American War of Independence (chapter 8) and its continued potential as a zone of conflict through the 1860s (chapter 10). Each of these examples, as David Preston suggests, might stand alone as studies of military history, yet Cohen's aim is more ambitious. Though Joseph Fischer notes that the author might have defined his terms in more detail, Cohen nonetheless appears to have taken Russell Weigley's *American Way of War* (1960) as inspiration and striven to write a worthy companion.

From the first, Cohen writes in a lively, engaging style, and the book is a fairly straightforward read, chapter by chapter. His scholarly range is impressive, bringing to life the *dramatis personae*--some already well-known to students of American military history, others less so--that appear directly after the table of contents. Fischer and Joseph Dawson offer due praise for this movement of biography into the larger realm of military history--especially the commendation of Robert Rogers, the leader of an early unit of Anglo-American Rangers (chapter 3)--and they both note with approval Cohen's analysis of Euro-colonial military methods adapting to a challenging American environment. All three reviewers agree that Cohen's analysis at the finer level occasionally reaches the level of brilliance, both for its readability and the depth of its research.

The drawback of Cohen's work exists at the larger scale--in both demographic and literary terms. Drawing upon his own background of studying warfare between Amerindians and British colonials, Preston notes that Native Americans are often more remarkable by their absence from Cohen's work. While they do figure from time to time, they often appear as

secondary players. Closer to Cohen's main point of contention, both Fischer and Dawson observe that the term *American Way of War* remains relatively poorly defined, and that arguments in favor of a particular view of American military culture appear disjointed.

On the whole, then, Eliot Cohen presents a useful survey of military history in the Hudson-Champlain corridor, but one that falls somewhat short of foregrounding what became the American Way of War. For students of American military culture, it is perhaps a supplement of only secondary value to the existing work of Russell Weigley and Brian Linn; but for students of American military history looking for analysis of particular episodes, it is a useful adjunct to more narrowly focused studies such as Ian Steele's *Betrayals* and Stephen Brumwell's *White Devil*.<sup>1</sup>

### Participants:

**Eliot Cohen** received his PhD in government from Harvard in 1982. The Robert E. Osgood Professor of Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, he is the author of, among other works, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, and directed the United States Air Force's *Gulf War Air Power Survey*. He has served in various government positions, most recently as Counselor of the Department of State in 2007-2009. His current research interests focus on the possibilities and limits of diplomacy in issues of war and peace.

**Matt J. Schumann** teaches at Eastern Michigan University and Washtenaw Community College, having received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Exeter in 2005. A student of Jeremy Black, he specializes in mid-eighteenth century Atlantic international relations. He has written articles on diplomatic and military history ranging in scope from the Baltic Sea to the Pennsylvania backcountry, and co-authored his first book, *The Seven Years War: A Transatlantic History* (Routledge, 2008) with Karl W. Schweizer.

**Joseph G. Dawson III** is Professor of History at Texas A&M University-College Station. He focuses on U.S. military history in the nineteenth century, with interests in civil-military relations. His books include *Army Generals and Reconstruction: Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), and *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999). He has also published essays on the early years of the U.S. Marine Corps in a 1998 issue of the *Journal of Military History* and "Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy's Offensive-Defensive Strategy" in a 2009 issue of the *Journal of Military History*. His current research project concerns the political and military interactions between Jefferson Davis and the

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Policy and Strategy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); Brian Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009); Ian Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Stephen Brumwell, *White Devil: A True Story of War, Savagery and Vengeance in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2006).

Confederate governors in the Civil War. Dawson earned his Ph.D. in history from Louisiana State University in 1978.

**Joseph R. Fischer** serves as a Professor in the Directorate of Military History, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He received a BA in History in 1975 from The Pennsylvania State University and was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt in the Infantry. He completed a PhD from Pennsylvania State University in 1993. He is author of *A Well-Executed Failure: the Sullivan Campaign Against the Iroquois, July-Sep 1779* (Columbia: SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) and co-author of *To Free From Oppression: A Concise History of U.S. Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 1996); *Standing Up the MACOM: The U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 1987-92* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 1996); and *Operation Uphold Democracy: The Role of US Special Operations Forces in Haiti, 1994-1995* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 1998).

**David L. Preston** is Associate Professor of History at The Citadel, where he teaches courses on colonial North America, the Seven Years' War, and the American Revolution. His first book, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783* (Nebraska, 2009), won the 2010 Albert B. Corey Prize for best book on American-Canadian relations from the American Historical Association and the Canadian Historical Association. His current project is a study of Braddock's Defeat in 1755.

Elot A. Cohen enters the historiographical discussions about the concept of “an American way of war” and his book, *Conquered into Liberty*, joins the list of good books treating Europe’s colonial wars in North America. Contending that there is “an American way of war,” Cohen identifies its origins a century before the American Revolution. He also analyzes a key feature of American military history—“the troubles that conventional armies have in coping with irregular opponents” (xix). His title comes from a proclamation by the Americans in the Continental Congress. Before the Declaration of Independence they announced that British Canada would be “conquered into liberty” (134). Cohen asserts that their way of war led Americans to conquer and eventually even to completely subdue their enemies, including compelling the conquered place to be made over in part, politically or socially, in America’s image. Cohen has written an ambitious study, based on his examination of many primary sources and secondary works that are cited in his extensive endnotes.

Cohen primarily addresses two centuries, from the 1680s to the 1880s, and a geographical area that Native Americans and European colonials called “the Great Warpath,” a phrase with numerous references in his index. This warpath encompassed principally the Hudson River corridor, the zone north of New York City, starting at Albany going along the Hudson, then up to Lake Champlain and along the Richelieu River into Canada toward Montreal and Quebec. Focusing on the warpath, Cohen selects events during two centuries, with half of the years falling before the United States declared independence, that set the precedents for “an American way of war.” Works such as Fred Anderson’s *Crucible of War* and Douglas Leach’s *Arms for Empire*<sup>1</sup> also stress the importance of the Hudson corridor in European colonial warfare in North America, and several works confirm that the “Great Warpath” was important to combatants during the American Revolution and the War of 1812.<sup>2</sup>

Cohen identifies a small colonial engagement on the Great Warpath at Schenectady, New York colony, in 1690 as making a crucial contribution to the American way of war that produced greater violence against noncombatants and aimed to annihilate the enemy, including “dismantling of a state” (25). This is a remarkable assertion based on a skirmish involving only a few hundred Indians and European colonials. Cohen also argues that, following the skirmish at Schenectady, during the early 1700s the French used a raiding strategy that contributed significantly “to an enduring American notion about war” (39)—it must be considered a “brutal struggle” leading to gaining a “complete victory” (39) over the enemy. Instead, Cohen shows that the French victory at Schenectady “helped buy New

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Knopf, 2000), and Douglas Leach, *Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763* (New York: Macmillan, 1973),

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), and Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

France decades of existence” (26) while it took Anglo-Americans some seventy years to decide to demand that the French completely surrender all of the colony of Canada—though not to bring down the French state itself.

Describing and analyzing several other battles along the Great Warpath, Cohen builds his case. In some battles Anglo-Americans began to employ what he terms a “skulking way of war.” Cohen explains that a “skulking way of war” involved departures from conventional European linear warfare by using ambushes, moving units by stealth, aiming fire at leaders, and inflicting casualties on noncombatants. Although he puts “skulking way of war” in quotation marks (12) and uses a similar phrase on page 78, he does not provide an endnote to a source or reference for the quote. He might have cited Patrick M. Malone’s *The Skulking Way of War*.<sup>3</sup> Malone argues that especially during “King Philip’s War” (1675-1677) in the colony of Massachusetts, Indian forest fighting forced English colonials to change their methods of warfare.

Cohen shows that in some instances, the British, French, and their colonial settlers adjusted their methods of war-making by no longer depending on war in the European linear conventional style, instead using “woodland warfare” (29). Decades of combat against Native Americans allied with the French pushed some Anglo-Americans to adapt their combat into the forests and employ increased violence, especially against noncombatants. Maverick British or provincial leaders participated in an American way of war in the French and Indian War (1756-1763). They included Robert Rogers and his colonial Rangers and regular officers commanding British units, such as Lord George Howe and Henry Bouquet. Altering military methods to suit both the environment and the enemies on the “Great Warpath,” Rogers, Howe, and Bouquet changed their tactics, unit organization, uniforms, and firearms.

Cohen demonstrates convincingly that by the time Congress declared independence in 1776, many Americans agreed the “Great Warpath” was a vital zone. In the American Revolution, Cohen points to examples of woodland warfare. However, one of his most effective chapters deals with Benedict Arnold and the Battle at Valcour Island, in Lake Champlain, in 1776. Americans used hastily-built naval vessels deployed in a conventional style to block British and Canadian forces conducting an offensive campaign into New York. In his chapter on the Battle of Plattsburg, New York (1814), an important engagement of the War of 1812, Cohen emphasizes that once again U.S. forces employed conventional naval forces on Lake Champlain to turn back a British invasion from Canada. These chapters can appear to contradict parts of Cohen’s thesis, as their military engagements were fought mostly by conventional forces, did not inflict vast casualties on noncombatants, and did not bring about the surrender of colonies or completely subdue nation-states. Indeed, Cohen concludes that while the War of 1812 had important consequences for the United States, such as increased U.S. nationalism and the defeat of Indian confederations (301-302), it did not produce sweeping victory or the abject defeat

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (1991; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)

of the enemy. For a thoughtful discussion of these matters, see Hickey, *War of 1812*, mentioned above.

Taking his thesis into the late nineteenth century, Cohen reaches a war too far by going into the American Civil War. Cohen informs readers of the potential role the Great Warpath *could have* played had the United States and Great Britain gone to war in the 1860s or later. Cohen supports this approach by pointing out that from 1815 to 1861 both nations built forts along the U.S.-Canadian border and each remained concerned about the other as potential enemies. Cohen attempts to clinch this extension of his argument by describing how a handful of Confederate raiders deployed in Vermont (which is not on the Great Warpath) tried to involve British Canada in America's Civil War. Antagonizing the British, the Confederates made no attempt to "conquer into liberty" a state located a great distance from the South. Moving his thesis a half century beyond the War of 1812 and relating it to American and British strategy in the 1860s adds nothing to Cohen's main argument. No armies were deployed or fought on the Great Warpath in the 1860s or after.

Consistently thought-provoking in arguing his main thesis through the War of 1812, Cohen occasionally discusses points, features, or people in such a way that may prompt readers to disagree.

For example, Cohen contends that the "first and most famous clash of white men and red along the Great Warpath took place on July 30, 1609" (10) when a French officer and his Indian allies fought against Mohawks—other Native Americans. On the other hand, Cohen devotes an entire chapter (41-70) to support a contrasting conclusion that the most famous military events in the region occurred during the French and Indian War in 1757 at a British outpost, Fort William Henry. There the clashes of Indians and Europeans created long-lasting themes in histories, novels, and films associated with the "Last of the Mohicans."<sup>4</sup>

Cohen asserts that the colonial military struggles between the French and their Indian allies and the British and their Native American cohorts pitted two sides that were struggling "for mastery of an entire continent" against one another (15). This view discounts Spain's control of huge portions of North America from Mexico City to San Francisco and from California to the Mississippi River.

Appearing to equate the British colonies with nation-states that participated in raising units of soldiers, Cohen may confuse readers in his descriptions of "provincial (full-time colonial) troops and militia" (45). He describes most of these units as usually unfit for extended campaigning outside their colonies because they were poorly trained, indifferently led, and unevenly supplied. Such units gained no respect from British regular army officers assigned to North America (45-46). Sometimes inspired to defend their homes and towns, ungainly "quarrelsome provincials" (50) in the militia were not winning

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Ian Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the Massacre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

complete victories over European armies, as Cohen clearly points out (86).

Rather than time and again showing a shift to an American style of warfare, Cohen sometimes offers descriptions and analyses of military events that demonstrate how European conventional armies supplied major victories for one side or the other in colonial North America. This contrast is especially highlighted in Chapter 2 in Cohen's excellent description of the Battle of Quebec in 1759 (117-122). After Quebec fell to the British, the quintessential American, Benjamin Franklin, related that "Englishmen were revengeful" (123).<sup>5</sup>

Cohen drives home his viewpoint that military encounters at places such as Fort William Henry in the colonial wars were significant later to an American way of war by connecting earlier actions to those of United States military personnel who decided to "burn populations out of their homes" in the 1860s and employed strategic bombing for "annihilating cities" in the 1940s (70). He also concludes it would not "be the American way to take artistic satisfaction in elegant rituals of surrender in the European manner" (70), bypassing mention of the ceremonies in 1945 of the German surrender at Reims, France, and the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay, to name just two examples.

Cohen makes a good case that one of the legendary figures in American military history is Robert Rogers. However, the Ranger leader in the French and Indian War is remarkable, as Cohen emphasizes, for being defeated at the hands of French and Indian enemies, when legend in fiction and film seems to portray Rogers as a successful practitioner of forest warfare. Rogers and his Rangers may be classified as exceptional soldiers, not typical provincial troops. It is puzzling for Cohen to conclude that Rogers and the Rangers therefore can be seen as providing the example for modern American average G.I.s, the citizen soldiers in World War II. G.I.s were trained to fight conventional warfare, not to take departures from concepts of war accepted by Europeans (93-94).

Many of Cohen's forceful arguments will require readers to take his analysis into account. Evocative period maps supplement his richly textured study. His discussions of U.S. military history reach beyond the main features of his book, one filled with important contentions about the American way of war.

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<sup>5</sup> For a work arguing that European methods of warfare remained significant in North America, see Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: the Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).



Eliot Cohen's most recent work, *Conquered into Liberty*, argues that the American Way of War owes much to the two centuries of warfare that marked relations first between French Canada and British North America then between British Canada and the United States along the area running from the headwaters of the Hudson River, through Lake Champlain to Montreal. Cohen provides an exceptionally good account of nine battles as well as two 'phantom campaigns' in the contested area. The familiar events such as the fall of Fort William Henry in 1757 to Marquis Louis Joseph de Montcalm as well as his successful defense of Fort Carillon in 1758 the following year find their way into the book as does Benedict Arnold's exploits in defending access to the southern end of Lake Champlain. Also included are lesser known engagements such as the defeat of Robert Rogers at the Battle of the Snowshoes or the American victory at Hubbardton and its role in bringing Major General John Burgoyne's army to defeat at Saratoga. The research is superb; the scope and depth of source materials noteworthy. Taken in its totality, it is a solid well written survey of the military history of the region.

What the work does not succeed in doing is proving its contention that the battles along the Great Warpath 'made' the American Way of War. To argue this degree of significance requires much stronger links than Cohen establishes. Cohen's technique is to note specific tactics or practices and then to generalize their significance to the evolution of the American Way of War.

Cohen needs to define his terms. What exactly is the American Way of War? Russell Weigley argued in *The American Way of War* that American wars from the Civil War on have been categorized by the use of overwhelming force to first destroy the opponent's military and then bring his government to the negotiating table. Weigley conceded that prior to the Civil War, the United States practiced a version of attritional strategy designed to wear down an enemy's military as well as his will to continue the conflict, in other words a strategy born of weakness.<sup>1</sup> Weigley later revised his earlier assessment of George Washington's approach to war to argue it was a strategy of "erosion."<sup>2</sup> Cohen's problem is that he leaves the meaning of his words undefined. The engagements along the Lake Champlain frontier seem to have one thing in common; they failed to quickly decide any of the wars of the two hundred year period that serves as the book's focus. The American Way of War argument fails if Cohen meant to suggest an examination of war at the level of strategy, unless he is arguing that the American Way of War is to wage protracted wars by choice,

Cohen's chapters on the fall of Fort William Henry in 1757 and the Battle of the Snowshoes later the same year leave the reader with the impression that the "American Way of War"

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<sup>1</sup> Brian M. Linn and Russell F. Weigley, "The American Way of War Revisited," *The Journal of Military History*, 66/2 (April 2002), 531.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

was not an approach to strategy but rather tactics. Cohen makes a solid argument (although not a new one) that what existed along the frontier was a conflict of modes of warfare.<sup>3</sup> The British capitulation at Fort William Henry turned into a massacre when Montcalm's Indian allies killed sixty-nine British and colonial prisoners after Lieutenant Colonel George Monro surrendered the fort and, according to the agreed upon terms, had begun the process of evacuating the post under the protection of French guards. To the minds of Montcalm's Indians, they had been denied the spoils of war and had righted the wrong. British and French regulars had brought a European concept of warfare with its own customs to include a culture of forbearance to the North American landscape but had failed to impose the new customs on the native inhabitants. In the clash of cultures that resulted, the price for engaging Native Americans in French and British contests often proved something Europeans abhorred but not sufficiently so to end the practice. Native American techniques of warfare, sometimes referred to as the "skulking" way of war, found a place in European armies.<sup>4</sup> Irregulars, whether Indians or backwoods Europeans, frequently provided the primary source of information for European regulars on enemy dispositions, doing so by stealth, ambush and raid.

Cohen notes that in this respect, Robert Rogers and his rangers provided the tactical basis for modern US Army small unit operations. Rogers' achievement was not in his military prowess. Cohen observes that he was often defeated. Canadian and Indian irregulars in the service of the French performed the same functions as the rangers and did so more effectively. What Rogers achieved was the codification of the "skulking way of war" by way of his *Rules of Ranging* (1757). Here Cohen overreaches. While admitting that the Standing Orders of Rogers' Rangers presented in *Conquered Into Liberty* was not actually that of Rogers but rather originated in the twentieth-century novel *Northwest Passage* and its later movie version by the same name, Cohen nonetheless goes on to suggest that the codification of small unit tactics began here.<sup>5</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that Roger's *Rules of Ranging* had much play beyond the French and Indian War. The historical evidence suggests that most light infantry units engaged in similar activities had their own version of rules and standing operating procedures.

Did Robert Rogers then serve as a Godfather for the creation of light infantry units capable of ranging operations? Cohen would have us believe that in some way he did. British officers such as George Augustus Lord Howe took notice of the rangers and began to create light infantry organizations, initially at a density of a company per regiment and later as entire regiments. In the thick forests of North America, light infantry operating as rangers served a role normally assigned to light cavalry in Europe's more open terrain, namely that

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<sup>3</sup> See John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-15 and Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 1-37.

<sup>4</sup> Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Roberts, *Northwest Passage* (New York: Doubleday, 1936), 104-106.

of gathering intelligence. The light infantry units British officers raised proved of mixed value prompting a move to recruit provincial units consisting of backwoodsmen from the frontier regions of Pennsylvania and Virginia.

While Cohen's narrative on the creation of light infantry rings true, it is not complete and therefore is overstated. Light infantry had shown its utility in Europe well before Robert Rogers's rangers. The Austrians had employed Croatian light infantry to hold their frontier against Turkish incursions in the sixteenth century. In the German states, princes created *jäger* units with short barreled rifles for use as skirmishers as well as for the gathering of intelligence. When the American Revolution began, Britain attempted to solve its manpower shortage by bringing German soldiers to North America. *Jägers* were part of this contingent. A significant literature on the subject of the tactics of small wars exists as to their employment.<sup>6</sup> The origin of American light infantry, if one takes the rifle companies that marched on Boston in 1775 as its beginnings in the Continental army, was not to be located along the shores of Lake Champlain but rather in the backcountry of Pennsylvania and Virginia. In other words, the window Cohen provides on the development of light infantry and the tactics of small war is too small in both time and place.

Moving away from the overall thesis of the book, there are parts that are particularly excellent. Cohen's chapter on Benedict Arnold captures not only the genius and courage of the man, but the troubled place he occupies in American history. Universally treated with scorn in most histories of the United States, Arnold is largely ignored in British histories. Of Arnold, Cohen writes, "The combination of Arnold's skills is staggering: He led on land and on the water, in siege and in the field, he had the talents to build a fleet and then fight it to the death" (193). If there was an indispensable man for the American cause on the Lake Champlain corridor, it was Arnold. Justly branded a traitor, in truth he contributed more to the final success of the United States than all but a handful of men. Cohen artfully notes the incongruity of Arnold's treason with that of others no less guilty but far less disparaged, men such as Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, Jubal Early and others who took up the sword in an attempt to destroy the nation Arnold had helped create.

Taken in its totality, *Conquered into Liberty* is a good book though not a great book. There is an alpha and omega undertone to the work. Arguably the contest for North America began with the early engagements pitting New France and its allies against those of British North America. Cohen suggest that with the American victory at Plattsburgh in 1814, the threat of foreign invasion into the United States came to a close though it was not apparent at the time that such was the case. As for British Canada, the United States did not conquer it 'into liberty' as American propaganda both warned and promised in 1775 for Canada proved beyond the reach of the new republic; liberty came nonetheless. Overtime, the two

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of light infantry in the eighteenth century, see Robert A. Selig and David Curtis Skaggs' excellent introductory essay in Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 9-38. The European origins of light infantry rest in the Croatian borderlands of the Hapsburg Empire.

nations have proven reliable and steadfast neighbors though this too came slowly. Seen as an account of the military engagements and cross-currents of Canadian-American history, *Conquered into Liberty* is superb. As an explanation of the America Way of War, one had best stick to Weigley and Brian Linn's insightful discussion on the topic.

The intriguing title of this volume, taken from a message that the First Continental Congress directed at French Canadians in 1774, perfectly captures not only the nature of warfare in the Champlain Valley, but also the overall tenor of Eliot Cohen's insightful analysis: "You have been conquered into liberty, if you act as you ought," the writers admonished the Canadians (134). The Second Continental Congress proved to be serious about the conquering part: it approved an offensive deep into Canada in 1775, a time when the war was ostensibly a virtuousdefensive struggle and the same year that Congress sent the loyal Olive Branch Petition to George III. From the 1775 Invasion of Canada, Cohen draws a larger conclusion that American wars historically have combined "idealism and calculating *realpolitik*." He references the wars in Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Iraq as subsequent examples of Americans "conquering others into freedom...with mixed motives and uncertain outcomes"—especially when they do not act as they ought (163).

Cohen's book is more than a simple perusal of important battles along the Great Warpath, a region defined as "the rivers, lakes, and lands between Albany and Montreal" (3). It is a powerful brief for the region's centrality in shaping the broader patterns of American warfighting and diplomacy. It is a crucial reminder that "the military struggle with what is now Canada was America's central strategic fact" (xvii), and that "Americans' conflict with Canada shaped much of their military culture, their way of war, their understanding of strategy" (333). The author frames this argument within an equally broad historical canvas, ranging from the 1690s to the 1870s; he takes readers from the macro strategic level to the operational and tactical levels of the battles and campaigns he so richly evokes.

Each of Cohen's well-crafted chapters (any of which could easily stand on their own) reveal facets of his overall definition of the American way of war. The 1690 French-Indian destruction of Schenectady reveals how the French strategy of devastating British colonial frontiers "produced one feature of the American way of war": a "quest for annihilating victories against any enemy" and the goal of unconditional surrender defined in subsequent wars (25). The 1757 Siege of Fort William Henry, with its controversial surrender and aftermath, demonstrates how American military culture "became a self-contradictory hybrid of form, restraint, and etiquette, on the one hand, improvisation, raw energy, and unwillingness to accept limits on the other" (70). During the French and Indian War, Cohen argues, Americans like Robert Rogers systematized the improvisatory lessons of frontier warfare, and they gained immense experience as logisticians in British-led military campaigns. As a result, the resourceful rebels during the War for Independence accomplished prodigious feats that seemed outside the realm of possibility to many British officers: hauling cannon across mountains in the dead of winter; carrying two offensives deep into Canada and nearly capturing Quebec; and constructing a fleet from scratch on Lake Champlain that Benedict Arnold led at the Battle of Valcour Island. Cohen also emphasizes the tensions in the American way of war between civil and military powers and between regular soldiers and militia. Those tensions and the threat of actual conflict persisted well into the nineteenth century. The last phase of the Great Warpath's history

revealed a “tradition in American statecraft” of restraining violence and pursuing diplomatic solutions that culminated in the 1871 Treaty of Washington (331).

Cohen’s book has many virtues that are worthy of emulation: it is an exquisitely written labor of love, well-grounded in a scrupulous combing of the principal primary sources, and informed by the latest scholarly literature. The overall argument largely harmonizes with recent studies by John Grenier, John Ross, and others that also identify a distinctly American way of war born out of colonial-era conflicts.<sup>1</sup> What differentiates Cohen’s book from similar works is the breadth of his coverage and depth of his analysis. Not content to conclude with the War of 1812, Cohen carries the story forward into the nineteenth century, revealing the deep trace that the Great Warpath left on relations between the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Cohen has a judicious sense of the human element in history as he demonstrates how personalities “often dictate outcomes” (266): his discerning portraits of the Marquis de Montcalm, Robert Rogers, James Abercromby, Richard Montgomery, Benedict Arnold, and John Burgoyne are complemented by portraits of lesser known or underappreciated figures like Frederick Haldimand, Guy Carleton, Jeduthan Baldwin, La Corne St. Luc, and Seth Warner.

If there is any weakness to be found, it lies in the book’s treatment of Indian nations which lived and fought along the Great Warpath. The effect of recent scholarship on American Indian peoples and nations has been to triangulate eighteenth century conflicts such as the French and Indian War and the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Indian peoples were not pawns or auxiliaries of imperial masters, but were equally gifted and skillful in negotiating their interests as Europeans (a fact that many European observers intimately familiar with Indians readily pointed out). In the same way, Native peoples had strategic and tactical intent in their warfare, not the mindless slaughter of innocents along colonial frontiers. Cohen rightly realizes that Indians “thought and acted strategically” and in a sense, “the Indians had chosen the French as allies” (10-11). He credits the Iroquois town of Onondaga as one of five urban centers that shaped the Great Warpath, along with New York, Albany, Montreal, and Quebec, while recognizing that Onondaga did not function precisely like a political capital (5).

Those promising lines of inquiry, however, are not fully developed. The book retains a more Parkmanesque focus on principal European combatants, the French, the British, and

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<sup>1</sup> John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John F. Ross, *War on the Run: The Epic Story of Robert Rogers and the Conquest of America’s First Frontier* (New York: Bantam Books, 2009); Douglas Edward Leach, *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Republics, and Empires in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David L. Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); and Jon Parmenter, “After the Mourning Wars: The Iroquois as Allies in Colonial North American Campaigns, 1676-1760,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no.1 (2007): 39-82.

the Americans, and the Indians seem largely absent as equal players.<sup>3</sup> Readers infrequently hear the voices of Indian peoples and the decisions that Iroquois communities like Onondaga or Kahnawake made. The Canadian Iroquois, the longstanding allies of New France, are barely mentioned despite the crucial roles they played in all North American eighteenth-century wars. The Kahnawake warrior Atiatoharongwen (also known as Louis Cook) would have been a perfect figure for the book, as his remarkable military and diplomatic influence stretched from the French and Indian War to the Revolutionary War (when he became a commissioned lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army) and to the War of 1812. Instead, Cohen describes Native warriors as “auxiliaries” in a struggle for mastery of the continent (15), and unwittingly conveys older views of Native savagery by using terms such as the Indians’ “Canadian handlers” (218). Indian allies were never on a leash, as the historian Peter MacLeod amply demonstrated in his work on “parallel warfare” involving Canadian Iroquois and the French: during the Seven Years’ War, he argues, “the French were defeated but the Canadian Iroquois were not.”<sup>4</sup>

A clearer recognition of the continuing military power of Indian nations and their shaping influence on American warfare well into the nineteenth century provides Cohen the interpretive link to broaden his general conclusions on American warfare to areas beyond the Champlain Valley. For while open warfare on the Great Warpath ceased after the War of 1812, conflict between the United States and Native peoples was nearly unceasing until 1890 (or perhaps 1902 if we include the native Filipinos struggling for independence in the Philippines); the American “quest for annihilating victories” that Cohen identifies (25) is perhaps better explained by the total nature of defeats that British colonists and Americans inflicted on Native peoples—including destruction of communities, loss of land, confinement on reservations, and erosion of traditional cultures and religions. This raises more fundamental questions about the Great Warpath: How did the American way of war created by the Great Warpath’s battles continue to have defining power once warfare had ceased in that region? What kept its lessons operative into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Was America’s “central strategic fact” (xvii) its broader wars involving Native peoples, and less the war against French Canada—a war in which the Canadians might be said to have been the auxiliaries of Indians?

These concerns do not diminish the overall significance and worth of this enriching work that I immensely profited from. Scholars of early America, military history, diplomatic history, and Indian history need to read this important book, one that would also be a wonderful text for class discussion. What I find especially compelling about the book is its reflective quality—the author’s willingness to posit lines of connection and influence between past and present. At a time when much academic history wallows in a state of

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Parkman’s classic interpretation, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (1884), presented the French and Indian War purely as a struggle between France and Britain for imperial supremacy in North America, a struggle he personalized by the two protagonists at the 1759 Battle of the Plains of Abraham, the Marquis de Montcalm and Gen. James Wolfe. See Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, introduction by Ian M. Cuthbertson (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Peter MacLeod, *The Canadian Iroquois and the Seven Years’ War* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1996), x.

esoteric irrelevance, here is a book that is refreshingly relevant and thought provoking. Cohen avows that “no historian escapes his or her time, nor should they attempt to do so, at least so far as the posing of questions is concerned” (xix). As a result, this is a work that will reach more people, enliven discussion about the relationships of the American past and present, and stimulate more interest in relevant historical sites than narrower studies with their “tens of readers,” as historian James Axtell rightly quipped.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 17.



Author's Response by Eliot A. Cohen, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies

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An author should be wary of responding to critical reviewers, including such thoughtful ones as these. In the interest of advancing a discussion, rather than responding to particular jabs with customary “that’s not what I said,” or “that’s taken out of context,” or “what do you mean ‘concede’?” let me address three themes: the notion of an American way of war, the question of Indian agency, and the centrality of the Great Warpath.

I intend to write a longer essay this summer on the question of the American way of war, its origins in our colonial and early Federal history, and its meaning today. Most historians would agree that Russell Weigley, marvelous historian though he was, was simplistic in his substantial book, *The American Way of War* (1973). He barely noticed the pre-independence past, had a curious interpretation of the Revolution, and plunged into a treatment of the Civil War that does not stand up. But surely he had a point in saying that an American way of war does indeed exist -- a way of war characterized by the influence of geopolitics, domestic politics, and the nature of military institutions on how the United States, even today, goes to war.

*Conquered into Liberty* suggests that that way of war has a number of features deeply rooted in the American past. In particular, it argues that it is a mistake to associate it simply, as some do, with the frontier conflict with the Indians over a period of centuries, or, following Weigley, to see its origins chiefly in the Civil War. Rather, for some two centuries in the early history of the United States the problem was *both* conventional and irregular, originating in the threats posed by European neighbors in Canada and on the seas, as well as native Americans along the frontier. European ships could prey on American commerce and assault its ports; European armies (and they alone) could seize fortified cities and launch conventional invasions; European agents (and they alone) could arm and sustain native Americans in protracted warfare against American settlements. On the other hand, native Americans alone could conduct protracted, successful low-level warfare in the forested periphery of the English-ruled settlements in North America. Without Indian auxiliaries, European armies courted, and often experienced, disaster in woodland warfare. And through the War of 1812, the possibility - nearly realized on several occasions - of a grand Indian coalition threatened the very existence of frontier America, though not (after the late seventeenth century) its core settlements along the coast. That the American style of warfare was different from that of Europe was recognized by numerous observers - Johann von Ewald, a German light infantry officer during the Revolution being one of the most notable examples.

The American way of war – its deep-seated approaches to conflict - has a number of aspects, including a commitment to large or in some cases unlimited objectives; an ability to develop, project, and sustain large forces in difficult terrain; its tense intermingling of citizen-soldier and regular; and its mixture of both unconventional and conventional forms of conflict in a single campaign (think, for example, of the modes used in the Northern

Campaign of 1777). For the argument that this approach emerged with particular distinctness (but not exclusively) along the Great Warpath, readers should see my book.

I have mixed feelings about the question of Indian agency. There is no question that the Indians were independent actors, and far more important than much of the historiography of the pre-Independence period has allowed, although I do find the bashing of Francis Parkman wearisome -- particularly given the barely suppressed note of envy for his literary skill and continuing popularity that often underlies it. But it seems to me no less true that there is more than a smack of political correctness in the attempt to make the Indians independent powers as consequential as the English, French, or Americans by, say, the 1750's, let alone beyond. To be clear: in the seventeenth century this does indeed seem to have been the case - the Europeans competed for Indian favor just as much as the other way around. And as *Conquered into Liberty* suggests, through the French-Iroquois wars of the 1660's and King Philip's War in New England, the Europeans were in mortal, or near-mortal peril in the wars with the native inhabitants of North America.

But by mid-eighteenth century the balance had shifted decisively. The Indians had suffered demographic catastrophe from disease and chronic warfare; they had no independent sources of arms and ammunition; they were incapable of reducing even modestly fortified positions except by great good fortune; they were so internally divided and so unaccustomed to formal discipline that they could not be kept on protracted campaign or made to endure serious losses; and they depended on the existence of an economy and a landscape that was succumbing to the steady flood of European immigration. I will stand by the term auxiliaries -- very important auxiliaries in the Seven Years War and the War of Independence and even, to a limited degree, the War of 1812, no doubt, but auxiliaries nonetheless. And although the Indians were indeed active in playing a weak hand (and no one excelled the Iroquois in this regard) it was nonetheless a weak, in fact, a losing hand.

It is a pity that despite the writing of excellent ethnohistorians who have made such contributions to recovering the Indian past, today's historians find it difficult to give them their due, but no more than their due, as the actors that shaped the strategic history of North America. It implies no disrespect for Indian culture or suffering if one acknowledges the basic facts: the Seven Years War in North America was decided by European fleets and European armies, including armies largely composed of Americans equipped and trained along European lines. Native Americans could help one side delay the outcome, but that is about all. To make the outcome of the Seven Years War in North America chiefly about something other than the Royal Navy crushing the French at Quiberon Bay, and British armies (often with large American components) taking Carillon and Louisbourg, or French forces (including Canadians) being overwhelmed at Quebec, Fort Frontenac, and elsewhere, is special pleading to the point of distortion of the historical record.

Finally, what of the status of the Great Warpath? I am careful to point out that many of the features of the American way of war emerged there, but not only there. What seems to me incontestable, however, is that this really was the central front in the confrontation with the powers that occupied Canada in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth

centuries. Some of the battles I describe in *Conquered into Liberty* were indeed decisive (Plattsburgh, for example, strikes me as such); others merely revealing. It was chiefly in this region that the threat to the American colonies of combined European and Indian forces were chronic. This was the great route to Canada, the conquest of which was a preoccupation of English and later American politicians for centuries. And had there been a third Anglo-American war -- a very real possibility, and one to which too little attention has been paid -- this would have been its central front. I freely concede that other locales were important: but I chose to write a book about the Great Warpath, and that is what *Conquered into Liberty* is about.

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