



First Nations: Battles won and lost

Character Education

- Progress towards an understanding of conflicted loyalties
- Prioritize desirable character traits
- Recognize positive character growth as an outcome of conflict

Facts

- The British started the War of 1812 with 5,200 British Army Regulars, 10,000 Canadian provincial regulars, 4,000 Canadian provincial militia and 10,000 First Nations allies; they had 48,000 British Army Regulars deployed by the end of the war
- In the First World War Canada's 114th Battalion, Brock's Rangers was largely made up of First Nations recruits
- Estimates hold that more than 7,000 First Nations people served in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War

Before the Reading

- List conflicted loyalties under the headings, Personal and Historical. An example of a personal conflict would be having to decide between two groups of friends; an historical conflict of loyalties would be French-Canadians choosing between separation and staying in Canada
- What are the THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER TRAITS that a person could have?
- Your family has treated you badly – you've been misjudged at school – your friends didn't support you when you felt they should – How can you resolve each situation TO THE POSITIVE? Why is it important to resolve these situations and not let them fester?



1915 "B" Company 114th, Brock's Rangers
Haldimand County Museums

<http://images.ourontario.ca/haldimandmuseums/72481/data?n=4>

Brock's Rangers, the 114th Battalion in WWI

Service in times of need has always taken precedence for Canada's First Nations patriots. In a letter dated May 20, 1944, Mrs. Lillian Martin quotes from her husband, Brigadier-General O.M. Martin's WWI scrapbook. The Brigadier was reminiscing about the 114th Battalion, Haldimand Rifles that became known as Brock's Rangers. Many of the First Nations volunteers for the 114th originated with the active militia on the Grand River Reserve. Fifty Mohawk soldiers from Kahnawake, Quebec and several from Akwesasne joined them as well as First Nations soldiers from Western Ontario and Manitoba. Eventually

Reading

Caughnawaga, Cayuga, Chickamauga, Chippewa, Delaware, Fox, Iroquois, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Menominee, Miami, Mingo, Mississauga, Mohawk, Nanticoke, Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwa, Onondaga, Pottawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, Sioux, Winnebago, Wyandot—at least a part of each of these First Nations are documented as fighting in the War of 1812—on the Canadian side. These peoples lived in the American heartland, all over Ontario and into the northwest; they spoke different languages, had distinct lifestyles and had their own strong leadership. Men like Tecumseh, architect of a grand confederacy of First Nations, Roundhead of the Wyandot, Chief Buffalo of the Ojibwa, Black Hawk of the Sauk, Main Pock, of the Pottawatomi, and Naiwash, Chief of the Odawa forged alliances with one another and with the British. They weighed their options and instructed their battle-hardened men when and how to fight. The First Nations forces were present at nearly every battle and siege of the War of 1812 and in many cases their participation made the difference. And contrary to common perception, the First Nations allies were not just there for the scare tactics. True their battle yells, the threat of the tomahawk and the fear of the scalping knife did help win battles. But, consider the other relevant factors.

There weren't enough British Army Regulars in Canada in 1812. They were in Europe for the fight against Napoleon. Fort Mackinac provides an example of the First Nations numbers that added up to victory. The *Siege of Fort Mackinac* in July 1812 took place with only 47 British regulars. The Northwest Company provided approximately 200 Canadian voyageurs many of whom were Métis. Indian Department Agent Robert Dickson recruited 113 Menominee, Sioux and Winnebago and with the help of Mrs Elizabeth Mitchell recruited 280 Odawa and Chippewa. The 61 Americans holding the fort gave up without a fight.

The numbers added up at the *Battle of Beaver Dams* as well. In 1813 the Americans had 600+ regulars to pursue the recently driven out forces from Fort George. The British had 50 regulars in place. However, Captain Ducharme of the Indian Department commanded 300 Caughnawaga fighters and Captain William Kerr and Chief John Norton commanded 100 Mohawks. The First Nations forces proceeded to use tactics they knew well—ambushes from the woods. The American forces caved into the guerrilla tactics and surrendered.

two companies with officers were composed entirely of First Nations. Here are the Brigadier's words from 1944:

"Haldimand is one of the Niagara district counties, a peninsula dotted with the battle grounds of the War of 1812. A little plot of British ground made famous by *Lundy's Lane*, *Queenston Heights*, *Beaver Dams*, *Chippawa*, and a dozen other minor but no less historic battles. In nearly all of these, the First Nations Indians of that day did yeoman service for Canada, and at Queenston Heights where the heroic Brock fell, their contingent contributed notably to the defeat inflicted on the enemy. The word Rangers is a stirring title of that and earlier times in Canadian History To couple this fine old name with that of Brock, and then to give it to the Corps being formed by the very men whose ancestors fought by his side ... is a peculiarly happy combination, and one which is giving the greatest possible pleasure to the men of the 114th. By such means as these is an *esprit de corps* speedily developed. Men try to line up to noble traditions and the example of the patriot Brock inspires to this day, more than a hundred years after he made his supreme offering to this country and his King."



Embroidered crest of the 114th Battalion, Haldimand County; also called Brock's Rangers University of Calgary

The 114th adopted a crest with two crossed tomahawks below the motto "For King and Country"; the flag was decorated with Iroquoian symbols thanks to the Six Nations Women's Patriotic League.

Although the 114th was disbanded in 1916, many of its members ended up part of an engineering brigade which contained more than 500 native Canadians.

The tactical skills of the First Nations fighters had been pivotal before Fort Mackinac and Beaver Dams. After Brock's death at The *Battle of Queenston Heights* William Kerr, John Norton, John Brant and a small force of 150 Mohawk and Delaware pinned down the Americans. The First Nations fighters scaled the escarpment on a road west of Queenston and for many hours kept up a flanking fire on the American invaders on the heights. Using the tree line for cover, they attacked and then disappeared

Captain William Johnson Kerr and the “first family” of the First Nations

Captain William Johnson Kerr (1787-1845) was a grandson of Sir William Johnson and Mary (Molly) Brant who married Elizabeth Brant, daughter of Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea). The Brants were considered the “first family” of the First Nations as they had many prominent members. William gained his prominence during the War of 1812 as an officer in the Indian Department. At the *Battle of Queenston Heights* he, John Brant and John Norton led the First Nations forces that pinned the Americans down on the heights. Later, also with Norton, Kerr and the First Nations forces helped stem the American attack at Fort Erie. Kerr was active at the *Battle of Beaver Dams*. He and John Brant were at the head of 100 Mohawks from Grand River who fought alongside Dominique Ducharme and a large party of First Nations fighters from Lower Canada. They used guerrilla tactics to attack the Americans from the rear along an enclosed, wooded section of the trail near Beaver Dam. Later, Captain Kerr was captured and he spent some time as an American POW. Fellow captive described him as, “a very fine young man, tall and handsome.” In later life Kerr was a magistrate and eventually a member for

Lincoln in the House of Assembly. Captain Kerr’s mother-in-law Catherine Brant, named Captain Kerr’s son, William Simcoe Kerr head chief of the First Nations Confederacy. At the time of his death, Captain Kerr was living in the house that Joseph Brant had built on Wellington Square, now Burlington, embraced by the large Brant family that has served in Canada’s military through all wars. For example, Brant descendant, Lt. Cameron Dee Brant, was one of the First Nations volunteers for WWI. He died at Ypres.



Studio portrait, taken in July 1882 at Brantford, Ontario, features surviving Six Nations fighters who fought with the British during the War of 1812. Right to left are: Sakawaraton – John Smoke Johnson (b. ca. 1792), John Tutela (b. ca. 1797), and Young Warner (b. ca. 1794), LAC C-85127 ParksCanada.gc.ca

Also see <http://readingandremembrance.ca/2009.html> First Nations

again. Their swift darts in and out of cover gave the Americans the impression that they were outnumbered. The First Nations attackers were always low to the ground, leaving the Americans no open shots. To make matters worse, the small troop was reinforced by 80 Cayuga from Fort George. Some American troops became so terrified of the unseen force they threw themselves over the cliffs rather than risk capture. Eventually reinforcements took over from the First Nations. The battle was won because the First Nations had held the Americans in check.

The First Nations proved repeatedly that they were valuable additions to the war effort as they were skilled guerrilla and tactical fighters, guides and scouts. They knew the terrain. They’d created the forest pathways through which men could pass with stealth and developed the portage routes that connected the Great Lakes. The 104th Regiment of Foot was guided on its difficult 53 day winter march from New Brunswick to Lower Canada (Quebec) by four Native Canadians. Additionally, the First Nations could camp and live off the land and handled a variety of weapons from muskets to tomahawk, to knives, bow and arrows and wooden ball-headed club.

Most significantly, the First Nations forces were accustomed to fight under command. Their survival had traditionally depended upon stealth, discipline and efficiency of kill. Chief Black Hawk of the Sauk eventually pulled out of the war in disgust at the tactics used by non-native commanders, tactics he considered wasteful of good men.

“I explained to them the manner the British and Americans fought. Instead of stealing upon each other, and taking every advantage to kill the enemy and save their own people, as we do, (which, with us, is considered good policy in a war chief) they march out, in open daylight, and fight, regardless of the number of warriors they may lose! After the battle is over, they retire to feast, and drink wine, as if nothing had happened; after which, they make a statement in writing, of what they have done—each party claiming the victory! and neither gives an account of half the number that has been killed on their own side. They all fought like braves, but would not do to lead a war party with us.”



Plaster life cast of Black Hawk, original ca. 1830, at Black Hawk State Historic Site.

In spite of Chief Black Hawk's complaints, the First Nations' abilities as guerilla fighters became valued. Specialized rifle companies, such as Dolsen's Rifles, even began to be trained to pick off military leaders and musicians to put enemy troops into disarray. The *Battle of Chrysler's Farm* November 11, 1813 demonstrated all available tactics.

The right flank skirmish line

included two dozen Mohawk fighters from Tyendinaga positioned in the woods for surprise attacks. Facing an almost impossible task that day, the British regulars, Canadians of both French and English descent and Mohawk fighters defeated the American invasion bent on sweeping up the St. Lawrence, cutting communications and taking the heart of the continent. With all their capacities employed, and united, the Canadians held.

The First Nations' presence in the war is traditionally attributed to Shawnee leader Tecumseh's compelling oratory skills and visionary leadership. Tecumseh did bring many of the First Nations into a confederacy and then delivered that combined force to the Anglo-Canadian side in the battle for the continent. Without Tecumseh and his forces the war would have played out very differently.

Hidden behind the massive shadow of Tecumseh, however, is the Indian Department. From its earliest days the Indian Department worked at peace-making in the wilderness. It slung small safety nets around its nationals among the far more numerous and well-armed First Nations. The Indian Department secured lands for forts and issued yearly presents. For example, Fort Amherstburg as a gift-giving centre supplied food, cloth, tools, weapons and ammunition that kept the First Nations at peace with the British trade empire. Keeping the First Nations on side enabled British commercial interests to flourish in the interior of North America even in the face of French and American competition.

When it came time to fight in 1812, many of the officers of the Indian Department took part in actions of the war at the head of the First Nations forces they recruited. Lt. Colonel William Caldwell, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, led his First Nations troops at the *Battle Chippawa*, *Lundy's Lane* and *Fort Erie*. His Métis son, Captain Billy Caldwell of the Indian Department, also

known as Chief Sauganash, led his Caldwell's Rangers at the *Battle of Raisin River*. They'd been trained in forest warfare. Instead of the usual red coat, they wore plain green to camouflage. They carried a musket and for close combat a tomahawk. Caldwell's Rangers was formed in response to a request by First Nations chiefs.

After recovering from wounds from the *Battle of River Raisin*, Captain Caldwell served during the *Siege of Fort Meigs* and *Fort Stephenson* and at the *Battle of Moravietown*. And thus it went with other pivotal Indian Department leaders. Even Indian Department storekeeper John Askin Jr. participated along with the 280 Odawa and Chippewa men he'd recruited for the 1812 battle for Mackinac.

After their defensive coup at Queenston Heights, John Brant, Mohawk Chief and Lieutenant in the Indian Department and the Métis chief John Norton, an Indian Department interpreter led their recruits at many later skirmishes on the Niagara frontier. Indian Department officers and officials were recruiters and leaders throughout the war. They were bilingual and tied to the First Nations by blood, marriage or friendship. They were an essential ingredient of the glue that made the alliance of the First Nations with the British and Canadian forces stick.

In 1815 after the *Treaty of Ghent* and other treaties disastrous to the aspirations of the First Nations, settlers demanded increasingly more property. The pressure for First Nations lands mounted. Very quickly the First Nations were seen as irksome impediments to growth and prosperity—their soldiering in defense of Canada was promptly and conveniently forgotten. The militia began to draw on the ever-growing settler population to meet the colony's defensive needs. In the decades following the War of 1812, British administrators started reshaping the vision of First Nations. The picture of the skilled, valiant allies morphed into the image of First Nations as dependents—from warrior to ward. The nature of the Indian Department changed.

Over the centuries school children rarely heard of the Caughnawaga, Cayuga, Chickamauga, Chippewa, Delaware, Fox, Iroquois, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Menominee, Miami, Mingo, Mississauga, Mohawk, Nanticoke, Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwa, Onondaga, Pottawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, Sioux, Winnebago, Wyandot—the strong, skilled First Nations soldiers who had come to the defense of an invaded country, helped secure it and put it on its path to nationhood.

After the Reading

- List all the skills and character traits the First Nations brought to the War of 1812
- Make a list of the First Nations leaders, Indian Department officials and First Nations peoples that you need to look up to find out more about
- What good and bad perceptions of First Nations are mentioned in this reading? How did these perceptions get started? Why did First Nations continue to fight for Canada in WWI, WWII and Korea?
- Why were the First Nations mostly written out of the history of the War of 1812? How can they be written back in?

Extensions

- Research wampum belts and provide illustrations of some historic designs. Design or draw a wampum motif that could be used to record your new understanding of First Nations contributions to the War of 1812
- How does the Minute about Brock's Rangers demonstrate that you do not have to be beaten down by adversity? Research and present three instances of individuals who have not given into adversity and explain how they grew through it
- The strategies of fighting in war tend to change with weapons. Create a survey of pivotal weapons that changed warfare

Sources

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