

Book Reviews

Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I. L. JAMES DEMPSEY. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1999. 123 p. ISBN 0-88977-101-4.

Since the appearance in 1983 in *Alberta History* of James Dempsey's groundbreaking article, "The Indians and World War I," and the publication two years later of Fred Gaffen's *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton, 1983), we have seen a growing, if still relatively small interest in the study of the role played by the aboriginal peoples of Canada in this century's major wars. For the most part, scholars in the fields of both military and native studies who have since taken up research into aspects of the subject have focused their attentions on the period since 1939, leaving the story of aboriginal participation in "the war to end all wars" too little documented and understood. Dempsey is the notable exception and the present volume, albeit limited in scope by its regional rather than national perspective, is a welcome addition to the existing literature. In publishing *Warriors of the King*, the Canadian Plains Research Centre brings to a wide audience the evidence and analysis set out by Dempsey in his 1987 University of Calgary MA dissertation, "Indians of the Prairie Provinces in World War I." It is only to be regretted that publication has been twelve years in the coming.

Dempsey suggests that a study of the participation of western Indians in the First World War offers a unique opportunity to view their society one generation after the signing of treaties. From the beginning, then, *Warriors of the King* sets out on the ambitious task to provide more than a chronicle of the military contribution of prairie First Nations to the war effort. Dempsey wants us to see not only the manner in which prairie Indians responded to the call to arms, but also the societal conditions that shaped that response and the impact of the war upon the Native community.

His preoccupation with the question, "Why did Prairie Indians enlist?" frames much of the discussion in the initial chapters. He puts forward three

principal explanations: the continued existence of a warrior ethic; loyalty to the British Crown, with which the treaties of an earlier generation had been signed; and the opportunity that the war offered to young Indian men to escape a stagnant reserve life. In the end he concludes that the first two were the primary motivators. Many young Canadians of varied backgrounds marched off to war in the belief that it would be an adventure. Others, no doubt, felt a responsibility to stand with Britain. But it is Dempsey's thesis of a "warrior ethic" – that there was something particular in the prairie Indians' world view which helped formulate their reaction to the war – that is most intriguing. It is a theme which he has explored in a broader context in earlier work, particularly his 1988 article in *Alberta History*, "Persistence of a Warrior Ethic among the Plains Indians." Nevertheless, this reviewer has been unable to resolve from reading *Warriors of the King* whether it was the continued survival within Native society of a vibrant warrior ethic (despite all attempts by the government and the dominant society to eradicate it) that helped predispose the prairie Indian to view the war in a certain way – or whether, contrarily, that participation was seen within the community as a means to re-create this largely *lost* aspect of culture (as one way, perhaps, of stemming the erosion of a social structure).

In his initial chapter, "Native Culture and its Suppression," Dempsey sets the stage by discussing the role of warfare in pre-treaty prairie Indian society and by painting a portrait of the reserve life being lived by many western Indians, particularly those located in the farming belt. It was, by 1914, a life marked by cultural suppression and stultifying restrictions on personal liberty. Here, as well, he presents his case for loyalty to the British Crown, rather than the Canadian state, as a factor shaping Native response to war – although the "loyalty" argument is the least developed in Dempsey's book, and the evidence probably the weakest. The next two chapters are taken up largely with an analysis of policies and practices related to recruitment and enlistment and a description of the military experiences of Indian soldiers. These chapters trace the evolution of government policy from discouragement of Indian recruits at the war's outbreak through to active participation by the Department of Indian Affairs after 1916 in promoting enlistment. In recounting the story of conscription, the initial inclusion of Indians within the scope of the 1917 *Military Service Act*, and ultimately, the exemption from compulsory service provided by order-in-council in January 1918, Dempsey links the reluctance on the part of a significant portion of the community to accept compulsory enlistment to prairie Indian traditions of voluntary participation in warfare. Dempsey looks at the obstacles to Indian enlistment and to the debate surrounding the raising of "all-Indian" units. He as well presents evidence on the collective experiences of the prairie Indian soldier: the numbers enlisted and sent overseas; casualties, illness, and desertion; and the native soldier's treatment as an Indian in the largely white military world. On the

last point he concludes that the Indian did not in general, as an individual soldier, suffer discrimination.

Warriors of the King provides a number of vignettes of the careers of soldiers and highlights some of the battalions which drew relatively large numbers of prairie Indian recruits. He notes the concentration of Indian soldiers in pioneer, forestry, and railway units, in which they served primarily as manual labourers rather than front-line fighters. He attributes this situation to the discriminatory attitudes of the military bureaucracy. Such an argument might have carried more weight, however, had military sources been used more extensively, and indeed, the entire discussion of the collective experience of prairie Indian soldiers and of individuals' careers might have been thereby strengthened. It is clear from his footnotes and bibliography that Dempsey has canvassed the Department of Indian Affairs records at length. Nonetheless, it appears that he has made only limited use of individual soldier case files (more of which will be said of that later). Moreover, there is no evidence that he has consulted the considerable body of military unit records that exist: for example, the war diaries in Record Group (RG) 9, Records of the Department of Militia and Defence, at the National Archives of Canada; the Part II Daily Orders in RG 150, Records of the Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada; and the unit operational files in RG 9 and RG 24, Records of the Department of National Defence. The collective picture which emerges from an analysis of the role of the Indian soldier within the context of his individual unit might have revealed patterns within such subjects as sickness, wounds, promotions, conduct and discipline, or honours and awards – patterns that are obscured in other records.

Warriors of the King provides the reader with a relatively limited picture of non-combatant prairie Indians' war experience. That is fair enough, since Dempsey's primary focus is on the role of the Indian soldier. Moreover, the effect of the war on local communities is not easily documented, especially from evidence likely to be found in government headquarters files, which form a major part of Dempsey's primary sources. Although, in order to present a more local perspective, he has made extensive use of Indian Agency papers housed at the Glenbow Archives, he has not consulted similar field office material in the historical record of the Department of Indian Affairs, now in the National Archives of Canada. He does, however, discuss the financial contributions made by prairie Indians to the Red Cross and to the Patriotic Fund drives. An appendix provides a financial account of contributions broken down by band or agency, information which is reproduced in summary form drawn from the more detailed statement which appeared in Duncan Campbell Scott's essay, "The Canadian Indians and the Great World War," published in 1919. Nevertheless, the role of prairie Indian women in the war effort receives little attention apart from scattered references to their work in providing creature comforts such as socks and bandages for overseas, and the

formation of Red Cross societies and patriotic leagues on reserves. As well, it might have been possible to draw conclusions about the situation faced by soldiers' dependents, particularly women, from individual case files on separation allowances, assigned pay, and pensions found in the records of the Department of Indian Affairs, sources which Dempsey seems not to have canvassed.

In his final chapter, "After the War" (an analysis of the circumstances faced by the returned Indian soldier), Dempsey's assessment remains substantially unchanged from that presented in his 1989 *Native Studies Review* article, "Problems of Western Canadian Indian War Veterans after World War I." His conclusions are harsh, somewhat more so than those of Brian Titley in his study *A Narrow Vision* (Vancouver, 1986) or John Taylor in his *Canadian Indian Policy During the Inter-War Years* (Toronto, 1986). Whereas those authors present evidence that the Greater Production scheme offered some positive results and that some benefit came to Indian veterans from the provisions of soldier settlement legislation, Dempsey sees these programs as having been, respectively, detrimental to prairie Indian communities and discriminatory against individual Indian veterans. While I do not quibble particularly with Dempsey's interpretation of the sources, I believe that readers will find in Titley and Taylor clearer descriptions of the legislation and policy behind the post-war programs and their mechanics.

While *Warriors of the King* deserves an important place in the academic literature concerning twentieth-century Canadian Indian military history, Dempsey's work should be especially appreciated by those who wish to use the individual-level information contained in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) personnel case files to examine the collective experiences of Indian soldiers. His eighteen-page appendix, "Prairie Indian Enlistees of World War I," finally brings into publication a revised version of the detailed listing of soldiers that first appeared in his 1987 thesis. The military did not differentiate Indian soldiers from those of other ethnic origins in its personnel record-keeping system. The Department of Indian Affairs, on the other hand, did keep extensive records of Indian enlistments, albeit as Dempsey notes, not as comprehensive as one might have liked. And it is largely from these Department of Indian Affairs records that Dempsey has been able to compile the names for his listing. In providing the name, and in many cases the regimental number, of some 400 prairie Indian soldiers, he has forged a key to unlock the CEF personnel case files for the purposes of quantitative research.

That said, Dempsey has left this reviewer somewhat puzzled by his failure to provide, in an otherwise meticulously documented book, a precise statement of the extent of his use of military case file records. His introduction refers to them as one of the "major sources" for the book (p. vii), yet they are cited neither in his bibliography nor in the book's appendix. For many years, access to these records was limited by the constraints of privacy legislation.

Indeed, in writing his thesis, on which the present book is so largely based, Dempsey would have been able to consult only some of the case records (for example, those of soldiers known to have been killed). Over the past decade, however, the CEF personnel files have been opened to research. Their indexes are now available to a wide audience through the National Archives web site (www.archives.ca). Dempsey does not make clear the extent to which information from his 1987 thesis has been supplemented for the present publication by evidence from the material opened in the intervening twelve years. Readers can only make an informed judgment on an author's conclusions when they possess a full knowledge of the sources upon which those conclusions are based. As it is, we are left unsure as to whether Dempsey's findings reflect as the fullest use of the case file record possible.

Warriors of the King should be seen as a major contribution to the study of a too often overlooked aspect of military and First Nations history. It is a handsome book which includes fifteen illustrations from the Glenbow Archives and from the author's personal collection. One in particular, an image of a cowhide robe decorated by Mike Mountain Horse in the traditional manner of the Blood Tribe and depicting his experiences, is an especially evocative record. Such a fine regional analysis only whets the appetite for comparative views of the First World War experiences of the First Nations of Atlantic Canada, central Canada, and the Pacific Coast. A wealth of source material awaits, as rich as that which Dempsey has mined for his study of prairie Indians.

Bill Russell

National Archives of Canada

In Search of Geraldine Moodie. DONNY WHITE. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998. 182 p. ISBN 0-88977-109-x.

In publishing the monograph *In Search of Geraldine Moodie*, Donny White has taken a significant step towards the reassertion of the photographer Geraldine Moodie's rightful place in history. White has explored various collections, both private and institutional, during the seventeen years of research that went into the production of the book, then pieced together the various photographs, letters, and public records in an effort to reconstruct Moodie's legacy. He has made good use of an array of sources. His broad search through scattered collections, from the British Museum to those of Moodie's great-granddaughters, has brought to light a selection of Moodie's work that might have remained buried for decades longer had he not invested the time and effort. Indeed, White does researchers, and casual readers, a great service: many of the images have been in storage for almost one hundred years, while many more have never enjoyed wide circulation.