BOOK REVIEWS


The Conquerors. A Narrative is Allan W. Eckert's third volume in a series showing how "the white man took North America from the Indians." Volume I, The Frontiersmen. A Narrative, and Volume II, Wilderness Empire. A Narrative, were reviewed in the January 1970 issue of this magazine. In these books appeared English colonials prominent in the struggle for empire: George Rogers Clark, Simon Kenton, Daniel Boone, Arthur St. Clair, Anthony Wayne, Sir William Johnson, Robert Rogers, Christopher Gist, George Washington, and George Croghan, to name a few; and professional military leaders, Generals Braddock, Forbes, and Howe. Tecumseh and Pontiac were outstanding among the many Indian leaders.

Eckert, in Volume III, The Conquerors. A Narrative, continues his dramatization of characters and events, once more without losing sight of his basis for accuracy in written records. Thus the book picks up a narrative sweep that quickens the pace of the ambitious historical series, which ultimately will reach the Pacific. Eckert's handling of this technique improves with each volume. He states in his "Author's Note" that his writing "is fact, not fiction. It is living history; the narrative account of the day by day, often minute by minute, experiences of the people and events of the period it covers . . . ."

Almost universally hated by colonials is General Jeffrey Amherst, who will take no advice from men like Sir William Johnson, George Croghan, or Major William Rogers either on Indian policy, on the needs of frontier settlements, or on fighting techniques. Desperate dispatches from his commandants at frontier forts are also brushed aside.

The sections on Forts Pitt, Bedford, Ligonier, and on Commandants Bouquet and Ecuyer will be of special interest to Western Pennsylvanians. The battle of Bushy Run is well written.

The section of the book on the defense of the Lake Michigan area, being closely linked to the fate of southwestern Pennsylvania, will also interest the readers of this magazine: the stand of Major Henry Gladwin and his men at Fort Detroit; the gauntlet-like run of supply vessels up the Detroit River through the water gate of Fort Detroit; the game of baggitaway that led to the capture of Michilimackinac;
the human interest story of the Indian adoption of trader Alexander Henry; the massacre of a company from Fort Niagara on its way to Fort Schlosser along the narrow ledge-road above the Niagara River, on its way to the western country.

Eckert’s book has its heroes — and its dunderheads, whose equals would be hard to find in any war. First, Lieutenant James Dalzell from General Amherst’s staff, who after reaching Detroit with his company and immediately insisting on staging a surprise attack on Pontiac’s camp, was ambushed, with great loss of life. His head decorated a sharpened pole in front of Pontiac’s lodge. Second, the “megalomaniac” Colonel John Bradstreet, who was to render submissive all Indians along the lake shore. Instead he went about making treaties with the Indians, to the dismay of Bouquet and Gage.

Proud, arrogant Pontiac, with his sense of over-all military objectives, his ability to see the dead-end future for the Indian, his leadership, his mesmeric oratory, his intense devotion to his people, is by far the most interesting Indian protagonist. The fall of Detroit became an obsessive dream, never to be realized. Gradually, his allies deserted him; he moved his people to the Maumee River; and finally, although peace had been concluded between the English and the French, he wandered through the Indian towns in the Illinois country, wearing the full-dress French uniform once given to him by Montcalm, trying to arouse the war spirit among the tribes.

For a brave warrior, Pontiac’s death in Cahokia is an ironical anticlimax. Before the opening of a council meeting, accompanied by a friendly young Peoria brave, he whiled away the time by looking at goods at the trading post of Baynton, Wharton and Morgan. The young man stepped aside to let the Ottawa chief pass through the door, then caved in Pontiac’s head with a blow from his war club. (One recalls the death of the great warrior, Tiyanoga in Volume II, from the crudely made arrows of three young Indian hobbledehoys.)

Henry Bouquet’s death also had an element of irony. Recently promoted to Brigadier General, he had stayed in the service instead of retiring. In his next assignment, Florida, he succumbed to mosquitoes carrying yellow fever, this man who had survived Bushy Run and Fort Pitt. He, who thought in French, might have said, “C’est la guerre.”

Pittsburgh

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