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Review of *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War 1* By James Dempsey

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Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I. By James Dempsey. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1999. Photographs, appendices, bibliography, index. viii + 123 pp. \$19.95 paper.

James Dempsey estimates that some four hundred Indians from Western Canada served during the Great War (1914-18). That he can't be more precise is a consequence of the surviving military documents—the Canadian government did not keep accurate enlistment records for Aboriginal peoples. This problem, however, has not prevented Dempsey from piecing together the story of Western Canada's soldier Indians in World War One. In fact, he has provided an insightful account of how supposed Indian racial attributes played differently on the battlefield and the home front.

Warriors of the King opens with a contradiction. Dempsey describes how the Canadian government, through a variety of coercive and intrusive measures, attempted to eradicate "savagery" from First Nations peoples in the late nineteenth century. And yet this same government, in the first few months of the Great War, actively sought Indian recruits for the Canadian Expeditionary Force because of their "warrior" qualities. Despite this shift in official thinking, as many as three thousand Aboriginal men readily volunteered to fight for King and country for essentially patriotic reasons; almost one-quarter were from Western Canada.

Dempsey documents the role of Indian men in the overseas war effort by giving particular attention to several individual stories; he notes that Aboriginal cultural practices did not always fit easily with military demands and that some men deserted because of these differences. He also explains how the Canadian government refused to create an all-Indian unit, yet used the war effort to remove so-called troublesome Indians from reserves. Finally, he describes how post-war federal programs generally treated Indian veterans differently upon their return to Canada and how

the League of Indian Nations' attempts to secure proper recognition for the King's warriors were dismissed as bolshevism.

Warriors of the King would have benefitted from more contextual material on the Canadian war effort, especially on the domestic front. The treatment of Aboriginal veterans in the post-war period had parallels with the treatment of several immigrant minorities, the war having brought nativist attitudes to the surface. Dempsey also might have alluded to the fact that Indian participation in the Great War was in keeping with the Aboriginal tradition of military allies, especially in early nineteenth-century British North America. That the Aboriginal contribution to the Great War needs to be formally recognized by the Canadian government today is beyond dispute. *Warriors of the King* ought to accelerate this process.

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