

Book Reviews

The American Revolution in the West. By George M. Waller. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976. Pp. xxi, 153. Illustrations, notes, maps, suggestions for additional reading, index. \$10.00.)

George M. Waller eschews "academic profundities" (p. xiii) in this volume on military campaigns in the West during the time of the American Revolution. While all theaters are dutifully covered, George Rogers Clark's exploits provide a narrative focus. Waller's portrait of Clark is generally an admiring one notwithstanding Clark's "personal reasons" for pressing Virginia's cause. "Fortunately his personal ambitions coincided with the public interest" (pp. 49-50). Waller's story climaxes with the successful campaigns against Kaskaskia and Vincennes. The march on Vincennes and capture of the "hair buyer," British Colonel Henry Hamilton, was "a minor epic of heroic and determined men" (p. 69). Indeed, Clark may have aborted a decisive British campaign against the frontiers.

If Clark's heroics give this volume a dramatic unity, they also limit its scope. The American Revolution does not fit neatly into western history; conversely, the significance of these episodes in Revolutionary history is not clear. It is doubtful that Clark's conquests were important in treaty negotiations at Paris. Further, British-American conflict in the Northwest continued long after the war was supposed to be over. The time frame appears inappropriate too if frontier hostilities are seen in the broader context of white-Indian conflict. Waller is aware of these problems. Within the limits of his conception of the war in the West he succeeds admirably in reducing dozens of minor episodes into some kind of order. But this conception is too narrow to be of much use or interest to the serious historian; lay readers may be left with dangerous misapprehensions.

Waller asserts that "the ever-increasing number of Americans" moving West was "the most significant factor in determining the outcome of the war" (p. 96). But the shifting fortunes of war illuminated political and sectional tensions within the new settlements. It is clear that many frontiersmen were indifferent to the American cause; Loyalty was a major problem. Indeed, the political loyalties of westerners remained suspect long after the war, and, as

Waller points out, the westward thrust of settlement scattered population, creating a "new kind of weakness." The links between ultimate military success and political and social developments in the West thus appear to be more complicated than Waller allows.

Perhaps such "profundities" are out of place in a bicentennial history. Perhaps the only way to write a book about American "heroes" is to focus on military operations, no matter how trivial and no matter how complicated and compromised the motives of the protagonists. Yet if Americans celebrate "heroic" soldiers following "their leaders on seemingly hopeless missions, enduring privation and danger" (p. 31), must their Indian enemies always "lurk about" committing acts of unimaginable savagery on defenseless women and children? Must Indian soldiers be described as "unstable, vacillating, and unreliable" (p. 31)? Waller admits that "Indian-hating" whites committed some atrocities, but who would not hate the Indians of Waller's book? Surely a proper bicentennial history can celebrate the heroism and recognize the humanity of all American peoples.

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Fort Laurens, 1778-1779: The Revolutionary War in Ohio.

By Thomas I. Pieper and James B. Gidney. ([Kent, Ohio]: Kent State University Press, 1976. Pp. xi, 97. Illustrations, notes, maps, note on sources. \$7.95.)

This slim, attractive volume tells the story of Fort Laurens, the little outpost on the Tuscarawas River that marked the westernmost advance of American continentals into the Ohio country during the Revolutionary War. The fort was established by General Lachlan McIntosh, the second of four soldiers who commanded at Fort Pitt under General George Washington and the Continental Congress. Constructed in November, 1778, Fort Laurens was designed to support the line of attack against the British western headquarters at Detroit. Moving west from Pittsburgh, McIntosh had established a fort named for himself on the north bank of the Ohio River at the mouth of Beaver River. Fort Laurens represented a further extension westward some seventy miles.