

The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier. By John Grenier.
(Cambridge, N. Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xiv, 232. cloth, \$30)

Studies of America's military heritage have long looked at the relevance of home grown *petite guerre* ("little war" or guerilla war) and the evolving tactics of formal armies. For 400 years, these two American ways of war have each had their place in the creation of the United States, for good and for bad. Custer met his famous end for trying formal tactics against an effective guerilla force but he might have still won the day had he chosen to bring along his Gatlin guns. By both means, Americans have frequently engaged in what has been dubbed, in the late Twentieth Century, as ethnic cleansing. More than wars of revenge and bigotry, the frontier battles between whites and Indians involved seizing lands for remaking into Europe in America.

Whether this country's peculiar use of *petite guerre* is uniquely American or merits studying at all is debated. Part of the problem concerns what the Professor Grenier describes as a "lack of sophisticated military literature" (p. 223) on even well known historical events. He notes, for example, how different scholars have used Sherman's march in their arguments. One writer credits Sherman with the traditional American methods of laying waste to an enemy's territory on an industrial scale while another scholar wrote of him fulfilling the traditional strategy of seeking the total defeat of the enemy army. Historical fact supports neither of those claims but does justify the view of Grenier and others that Sherman's very American contribution lies as a "merchant of terror" who effectively used fear, not as a destroyer of armies or even of the state of Georgia.

Similarly, the lack of detailed studies on partisan fighting in the American Revolution in the South, and elsewhere, prevents a full application of it in this study. Did the Battle of King's Mountain represent the great clash between Americans using *petite guerre* and Americans using formal military tactics as a metaphor for the fate of the respective Patriot and Loyalist causes? Did those parties use the traditional frontier warfare practiced against the Indians on each other, complete with what observers today term as genocide?

The First Way of War does survey the evolution of *petite guerre* in American history from 1607 to 1814. The author points out how it propelled men like Andrew Jackson to the White House, shaped how Americans view themselves, and how Americans often privatized that form of fighting from collecting scalp bounties to using civilian and quasi civilian units of rangers. He points out that this country's *petite guerre* often blurred the distinction between soldier and civilian as it did combatant and noncombatant. That attitude, however, may have more to do with military conditions found on any frontier, whether in Medieval Europe or in the Trans Appalachian backcountry. Similarly, he argues that European armies saw guerrillas as only an unfortunate temporary expediency but that view would also be shared by the professional United States (and the Confederate States) military even to the present day.

This useful work points the way to the need for more studies that cover other periods and will use much needed further research in specific areas. Such books as this one also calls for American soul searching, especially as Americans fight not so new types of wars at the beginning of this century.