

Native Allies...Warriors

Centuries ago, in Iroquois, or Haudenosaunee society, strong able-bodied men were delegated as protectors of their people. Across Upper New York State, from east to west, they were prominent figures within their respective nations. When the protector was called to duty, one of the customs in preparing for battle was to place red ochre on his face and head and parts of his body. The ochre holds sacred meaning to him. The menacing look it gave him along with his fierce war cry served as a warning to his foes that he is prepared to die in defence of nation. There is a title associated with the protector that is expressed in the Mohawk language. That title is "rohskenhrakehte." It means – *he carries the ochre*. When Europeans first encountered the protector, it didn't take long for them to realize his fighting expertise. They considered him to be a skilful "Warrior," and in time he would prove to be a valuable asset to their cause.

As time progressed and European encroachment became more prevalent, Indigenous people found themselves embroiled in wars not of their own making. War campaigns waged by the French, the British, and the Americans escalated rapidly across many of the native territories. Haudenosaunee warriors, including those from other native nations became allies in the incessant war campaigns being waged. On June 18th, 1812, the United States of America declared war on Great Britain. One area in Upper Canada that the United States chose to invade was Queenston Heights, an escarpment above the village of Queenston located near present day Niagara-on-the-Lake. The battle took place on October 13th, 1812. Some of the Haudenosaunee who had moved to the Grand River territory after the American Revolution once again allied with the British Crown. Other native nation allies joined forces with the Six Nations as well. They were led by two prominent Six Nations leaders; John Norton, a Mohawk war chief of the Six Nations, and John Brant, the son of Joseph Brant.

Accounts say that the American forces, including the militia, could hear the menacing war cries of the warriors across the river. It caused them to become quite unnerved. They were well aware of their fearsome reputation. When the American troops landed at Queenston they managed to take hold of the heights. They soon encountered the native warriors who kept them tied down while British reinforcements from Fort George reorganized and assembled for an attack. At this point the American resistance began to fall apart. Many of them died as they tried to retreat back down the heights while others just surrendered. The native allies proved again just how invaluable they were to the British cause. Without their participation Canadian history would have turned out a lot differently.

On August 31, and September 1, 1815, Chiefs from Grand River Territory and New York State came together at the council house near Fort George. They condoled each other, and metaphorically buried a tomahawk beneath a white pine tree restoring peace once again among the divided nations.