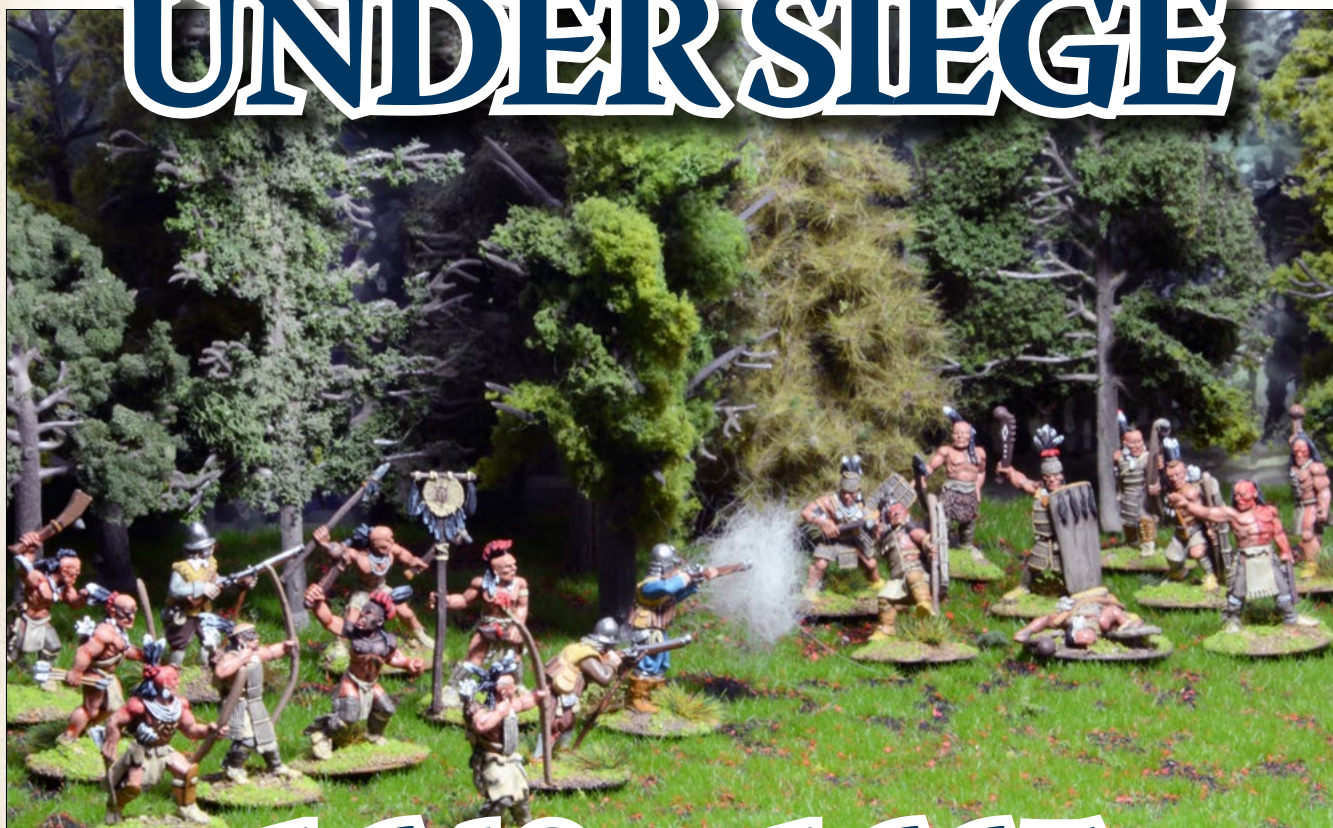


NEW FRANCE UNDER SIEGE



1640 – 1665

Nick Buxey digs into his collection to create 'Scenes from La Petite Guerre' showing New France's troubles in the North Americas against the Iroquois, who fiercely defended their lands.

A FATEFUL DAY

In the featured image on this page Samuel de Champlain and two companions accompany a Huron war party into Iroquois territory and reach what is now Lake Champlain. Champlain fires his arquebus and at least two Iroquois chiefs fall dead. It is 1609 and a fateful day for the future New France, for it seals hostilities between New France and the Iroquois for the next century. They become implacable enemies.

Hurons and Iroquois by Crucible Crush, with two conversions for casualties. Champlain is a conversion from a Bohemian Miniatures figure. The other two French are also from Bohemian Miniatures. Terrain is a moss mat from eBay. Trees: Woodland Scenics and Busch.

On a day in 1641, the governor of New France – Charles Huault de Montmagny – went with his entourage, flags flying, to meet with a delegation of the powerful Iroquois confederacy, ostensibly to talk peace. Relations between the French colonists and the Iroquois had been virtually on a war footing since Samuel de Champlain's first arquebus shots in 1609 (see 'A fateful day').

The Iroquois hated the French for siding with the Hurons and Algonquins, and resented the fur trade between them that proved lucrative to both of those parties. On the day of the 'peace' meeting, the Iroquois were in no mood for submission. Their derision of Montmagny's show of pomp outraged the governor, which was compounded when the Iroquois waved a fresh Algonquin scalp at the French and proceeded to shoot arrows at them. This was the start of an even more relentless guerrilla war on the part of the Iroquois, one that would last roughly twenty-five

years and almost bring New France to its knees.

A NEW WAY OF WAR

From the earliest beginnings of colonization in North America, the French had learned the Native American way of war the hard way. It was unlike anything back in Europe; nor was the land itself, being heavily forested and dissected by numerous rivers. So dense were the forests that rivers became essential as highways on which to travel any great distances. The French began to call the Native American style of warfare 'La Petite Guerre' (little war) for it mainly consisted of relatively small-scale raids involving few warriors. Hit-and-run, interception, surprise, stealth and ambush were the key ingredients of such warfare.

The French quickly learned that to fight Native Americans successfully, they had to adopt the enemy's tactics. Some early French colonists did this with success.



Left: A map showing the proximity of the Iroquois to New France and tribal enemies, along with their routes of attack in the 1640s to 1660s.

They even lived with the natives, learned their language and adopted their mode of dress. Such 'wild' Frenchmen became known as 'Coureur des bois' (woods runners). However, there were very few of these French and they were mainly involved in ensuring the fur trade flourished.

ATTACKING THE INTRUDERS

Back in the French settlements of Quebec, Trois Rivieres, and Montreal a small population of colonists were trying to make a go of it as farmers. By and large they were not of military stock and depended on a very thin scattering of ex-soldiers, hired by the trading companies, to defend the settlements.

As an indication of how weak New France was at this time, a comparison has estimated that New England had about 90,000 colonists, New France possessed just 3,200!

The Iroquois were able to raid far into the territories of New France, even sometimes to the outskirts of Quebec itself. By the 1640s they had one huge advantage over the French and particularly their Huron and Algonquin allies – they were beginning to possess muskets.

The French were reluctant to sell firearms to their own Huron allies, except those that had converted to Christianity under the auspices of the Jesuit missionaries. It was at Fort Orange (now Albany) that the Iroquois obtained their muskets through trade with the Dutch, who had no compunction in trading them for furs. The problem for the French and their Huron allies arose when the Iroquois exhausted the availability of fur-bearing animals within their



Left: Typical French coureurs de bois, emerging from the woods. They truly learned the art of 'La Petite Guerre' from their Native American allies and enemies. As such, they were invaluable scouts. Figures by Redoubt Enterprises.

own territory and were, thus, unable to trade for the desirable items the Dutch had to offer. It was then that the bellicose Iroquois turned greater attention to their Huron and French enemies and a vicious cycle of raid and counter-raid commenced.

The following pictures and their accompanying captions show typical scenes from 'La Petite Guerre' over the course of twenty-five years:

1) SNEAKING UP

In this picture (right), an Iroquois war party has travelled up the Richelieu River by canoe before making their way overland to the outskirts of Trois Rivières. They are now dressed and painted for war and have located a lonely French settlement.

Away from the buildings a French farmer ploughs his land, guarded by an armed militia man (he really should be facing the forest, though!). The war party stealthily sneaks up on the unsuspecting French, who are about to lose their lives and their scalps.

Attacks like this kept the French in a state of perpetual terror, always on the look-out for the Iroquois. It was psychological warfare at its best and worst.



Above: Iroquois by Crucible Crush, guard and plough team by Redoubt Enterprises.



Above: Iroquois by Crucible Crush and Redoubt Enterprises, Civilians from Redoubt and Bicorn Miniatures. Cabin by 4Ground.

2) THE RAID

A settlement of French colonists is caught unawares by an Iroquois war party in the 1640s. The warriors possess a couple of muskets and have opened up before charging in, yelling war cries, ready to do battle with their enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

Their opening shots have wounded a colonist and a warrior has rushed forward to take his scalp. Farmers hurry back from the wheat field to protect their women, who are terrified and attempting to run away. It will be to no avail. The farmers are only armed with farming tools and will be no match for warriors who have been trained since childhood. All the French interlopers will be killed or captured, and the Iroquois will loot and fire the cabin before returning home as quickly as possible to avoid pursuit.

3) PRISONERS

Iroquois took prisoners as an integral part of their war aims. Prisoner-taking was a ritualistic and religious practice, deeply embedded in Iroquois culture and beliefs. Before the advent of European colonists, prisoner-taking was a way of appeasing grieving Iroquois families who had lost relatives to war or disease.

The wars waged to take such prisoners were known as 'mourning wars' and it was these combat actions that truly encapsulated 'La Petite Guerre', rather than the infrequent shows of massed stand-offs between warriors with their ritualized posturing. Young children and some women prisoners could expect to be offered adoption into the tribe to replace its numbers, which had often been decimated by disease. If any refused, however, they could expect to be killed and possibly ritually tortured to death.



Above: Figures by Crucible Crush and Redoubt Enterprises, including a conversion.

All prisoners (both Native American and European) brought back to an Iroquois village would be made to 'run the gauntlet' - forced to run down a 'corridor' of club-wielding villagers to reach the far end. Treatment of all prisoners could be rough, but sometimes women and children ear-marked for adoption might receive a symbolic 'tap' on the shoulder instead. Many women captured then adopted by Native Americans chose to stay as members of the tribe, preferring their way of life.

Most captured grown men could expect to die slowly and in horrible agony, sometimes over several days. Ritual cannibalism sometimes followed the death of a feared or respected enemy.

In the picture above, three women are led away from the scene of their capture as hurriedly as possible. Scouts lead the way and two warriors at the rear watch out for pursuers. One is engaged in brushing away tracks with a branch of leaves. If the women keep up with the warriors and 'behave' themselves until any pursuit is left behind, they may then look forward to living. However, their safety is precarious: the warriors will not hesitate to despatch any or all of them if their own safety is in jeopardy.

4) PURSUIT AND AMBUSH

In the accompanying picture New France trading company soldiers pursue an Iroquois raiding party. The 'fleeing' Iroquois have led them deep into the woods where other members of the war party wait in ambush. Decoy is a classic guerrilla tactic. Once the soldiers have discharged their matchlocks they will be prey to the matchlocks and hand weapons of the ambush party and are unlikely to survive. Death would be preferable to capture.



Above: Iroquois from Crucible Crush, 17th Century musketeers in foul weather clothing from Redoubt Enterprises.

5) INTERCEPTION AND SURPRISE

A small party of Hurons, taking their furs from Huronia to the French settlements in the St. Lawrence valley by canoe, are pounced upon by a waiting war party of Iroquois. The Iroquois will take the furs for their own and trade them with the Dutch at Fort Orange in the Mohawk territory

Mostly the furs are beaver, which was in enormous demand in Europe for hats until the fashion waned. Hence, history has entitled this period of inter-tribal warfare as the 'Beaver Wars'. It resulted in the virtual annihilation of Huronia by the Iroquois, who did not reserve their attentions only for the Hurons. In fact, at this time, the Iroquois were more or less at war with all the tribes surrounding their territory – Amerindians of both Iroquoian and Algonquian stock. Of course, the systematic destruction of their Native allies infuriated the French, who were losing out on trade.



Above: Iroquois from Crucible Crush. Huron casualties and large trading canoe from Redoubt Enterprises.

6) JESUIT MISSIONARIES

It is not easy to say just how much influence the French Jesuit missionaries had on the history of early New France, but it must have been profound. Learning the Wendat language and living amongst the Hurons, they witnessed events first-hand. The records they kept of their experiences (Known as the 'Jesuit Relations') are some of the only references we have today of that period of history and of the Native Americans' way of life before European contact polluted their culture.

The Jesuits devoted their lives to attempting to convert the Native American tribes to Christianity, but their success was limited. Among the Huron they did make a fairly large number of converts, although this had the unintentional effect of splitting the nation into factions – especially so when the French refused to trade muskets with Hurons who were not baptized. The Jesuit priests were known to the Indians as 'black robes' and many distrusted their motives. Some were denounced as wizards and sorcerers and may have lost their lives because of it. The Hurons' enemies - the Five Nations of the Iroquois – hated the Jesuits and would happily martyr them in horrible ways when they captured them. Only the Onondagas gave the Jesuits an opportunity to live with them, but the experiment did not last long.

Some of the Jesuit priests themselves were happy enough to engage in 'La Petite Guerre' – and not just in preaching war against the Hurons' enemies, but by taking part. Mostly this was defensive in instances when Jesuit mission towns such as St. Joseph and St. Marie were attacked. However, it was not unknown for the odd priest to actually take part in raids – more so in the later Seventeenth Century when France became embroiled in war with Britain and had Protestant 'heretics' to fight as well as Iroquois.

The Jesuit priests in the picture are preaching to their Huron flock outside a crude, but serviceable church. They may be exhorting them to take the war to the Iroquois, or they may be preaching fire and brimstone to frighten the Hurons into conversion.



Above: Jesuit priests by Redoubt Enterprises. Native Americans by Redoubt Enterprises, Crucible Crush and Conquest Miniatures. The rather nice resin log church is from Barrage Miniatures and comes primed, fully detailed inside, has an opening door and an integral bell cast into the tower!



Left: Windmill by Tabletop Games. Palisade by Ironclad Miniatures. Figures by Bohemian Miniatures.

FORTIFIED WINDMILLS

The Iroquois' effective attacks against the settlers of New France manifested in many ways, engendering a 'siege mentality' within the colonies. Isolated homesteads were reconstructed in groups and fortified with palisades – much like their New England counterparts. Even windmills were made from stone and had palisades built around them, or at the corners of larger forts and used as watchtowers and strong-points. Small cannons were placed in some. The picture illustrates such a windmill, along with some local militia of the 1640s.

THE IROQUOIS

The Iroquois were a confederation of five distinct tribes: the Mohawk, the Onondaga, the Oneida, the Cayuga and the Seneca (later to become six by the inclusion of the Tuscarora). Their strength lay in their unity and in their relative freedom of action and flexibility within the confederation. For instance, if the Mohawk chose to go to war, it did not mean that any other Iroquois tribe had to as well.

The Mohawk may be the most bellicose of these 'Five Nations', but all were fierce and merciless warriors in battle. Women had a powerful place in Iroquois society and were much respected for their governmental opinions and religious involvement.

The Mohawk were certainly the most implacable enemies of the French and remained so well into the 1750s. Although later the Iroquois favoured the British and carried this through the American Revolution, their supremacy was finally broken by the Continental army and eventually they migrated to Canada, for by that time, New France was no more.

Right: Iroquois warriors from the splendid range by Crucible Crush.



7) THE BATTLE OF LONG SAULT, 1660

In 1660 a group of seventeen French adventurers ventured from Montreal and up the Ottawa River to protect an incoming load of furs. The leader of the group was Adam Dollard des Ormeaux, the young commander of the Montreal garrison. En route, the expedition arrived at an abandoned Algonquin stockade, consisting of a rough circle of cut tree trunks. The French proceeded to reinforce this with a barricade of goods and an extra palisade of newly cut logs.

In time, the French were joined by a war party of about forty Huron and Algonquin allies. This was unexpected, but then so too was the arrival of a substantial

Iroquois war party of approximately four hundred who were intent on raiding New France settlements. The Iroquois attacked, but initially made little impression on the fortified defenders. These Iroquois, of the Onondaga tribe, sent for reinforcements from their Mohawk brethren in the vicinity.

When the Mohawks arrived they included a fair number of 'Iroquoised' Hurons, who had been captured and adopted into the tribe. These persuaded many Hurons to defect from the French, making their number even smaller.

The Iroquois attacked with renewed vigour. In response, the French attempted to throw a 'bomb' (in fact a lit keg of

gunpowder) at the attacking Iroquois. Unfortunately, the keg somehow fell back into the stockade and exploded, killing many French and their Native allies. The way was now open to the Iroquois to massacre the remaining defenders.

After victory, the Iroquois returned home to celebrate and mourn their dead. When news of the action filtered back to New France, the population perversely interpreted it as a French victory and practically made saints of Dollard and his men. They believed that Dollard's group had sacrificed themselves to save the French colonies from a mass attack by the Iroquois. However, New France was as much under threat as ever and its siege mentality continued to grip it.



8) THE CARIGNAN-SALIÈRES REGIMENT

By 1665, the situation in New France had become so acute that Louis XIV, at last freed from the grip of Cardinal Mazarin, decided that the colonies in New France needed royal support and royal leadership. He took authority from the trading companies and broke their monopoly. Now he needed to defend his colonial possessions.

In a ground-breaking move, he decided to send the first royal regiment of a thousand men to New France. The initial strength of the Carignan-Salières Regiment was around six hundred men, but it was bolstered by veterans from other regiments to attain the one thousand required by Louis. It was a statement of his kingship.

On arriving in New France in the autumn of 1665, the regiment was almost at once sent on a campaign against the Iroquois. However, the venture was badly planned and badly led. At that time no combatants generally fought in wintertime. The expedition into Iroquoia was a debacle and resulted in the soldiers wandering into the Dutch settlement of Schenectady, half-starved, ragged, and cold. Furthermore, a few small, sharp brushes with the Iroquois had thinned the ranks.

Humiliated, the troops returned to Montreal. However, this did not deter the new-found French resolve to stand up to the Iroquois threat. A chain of forts and small garrisons of the Carignan-Salières Regiment were placed at strategic points to halt Iroquois incursions and in 1666 the French actually succeeded in taking the war to the Iroquois villages. There were countless small skirmishes. Eventually, a fragile peace was achieved, if only briefly. For a while, the French lived their lives in relative security. The 'siege' of New France was gradually being broken for the time being, but conflict between the French and the Iroquois was to continue intermittently for many decades to come.

The men of the Carignan-Salières Regiment in the picture are newly-arrived and therefore pristine in their uniforms. It does not take much imagination to realize that their appearance did not stay like this for long. The regiment was recalled to France in 1668, but most troops were induced to stay in New France by offers of land and, to the officers, titles. Louis wanted to bolster the thin population.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America* by Daniel P. Barr.
- *Canadian Military Heritage Vol. 1 (1000 – 1754)* by Rene Chartrand.
- *Armies of Early Colonial America, 1607 – 1713* by Gabrielle Esposito.
- *Black Robe* (film), directed by Bruce Beresford.
- *Canada: A people's History* (DVD set).

EPILOGUE

Hopefully, the pictures in this article will highlight what is so fascinating about wargaming this period. The so-called 'French and Indian Wars' started a great deal earlier than the 1750s, but the art of fighting 'La Petite Guerre' had to be learned by Europeans again and again – only those hardcore European woodsmen ever really understood it and were, thus, often greatly in demand by conventional armies (well, at least those who valued their worth in combat).

'Little wars' can be fought across the wargames table with relatively few figures, although perhaps the scenery may be a little more demanding for wargamers who really wish to retain a flavour of early North America. So, venture into the wilderness, but do keep a sharp lookout for ambush!