

## Exhibiting Warriors at Glenbow

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### Résumé

*Le Musée Glenbow a inauguré en avril 1994 l'exposition interdisciplinaire Warriors: A Global Journey Through Five Centuries, qui examine les problèmes auxquels se sont heurtés les combattants de nombreuses cultures différentes. Au cours de l'élaboration de ce thème, les conservateurs ont dû tenir compte de plusieurs facteurs, notamment la valeur d'une exposition interdisciplinaire, la difficulté de parvenir à un juste équilibre, la représentation d'autres cultures, la représentation des femmes en tant que combattantes, la recherche d'objets propres aux sujets retenus et la nécessité d'éviter de représenter les combattants comme des reliques du passé.*

### Abstract

*Glenbow opened Warriors: A Global Journey Through Five Centuries in April 1994. This interdisciplinary exhibit examines issues faced by warriors in many different cultures. The curators faced several issues in developing this theme, including the value of an interdisciplinary exhibit, the difficulty in achieving balance in the exhibit, representation of other cultures, the representation of women as combatants, finding artifacts to fit the topics, and avoiding the representation of warriors as relics of the past.*

In the summer of 1990, Glenbow's senior staff met to rethink the philosophical basis of our exhibits. As we turned away from a program that featured temporary, large, expensive, and often imported blockbuster exhibits we refocused on our own collections and the knowledge bases that have developed around those collections. Through our discussions it became evident that, although each of Glenbow's curatorial disciplines (Ethnology, Military History, Cultural History, Art) has a different theoretical and practical approach to the collections, a dialogue between (or among) disciplines can often lead to new insights about the collections. The synergy that followed from these discussions suggested that multidisciplinary exhibits may offer the public a unique perspective on issues that are key to contemporary society. As the Canadian cultural profile becomes more and more multicultural and multiethnic, museums must find new and better ways of developing dialogues among the cultures represented in our collections.

*Warriors: A Global Journey Through Five Centuries* is an interdisciplinary exhibit that looks at the key factors addressed by the men and women who served or serve their society as combatants. The exhibit provides insights about combatants throughout history and raises questions about the relationship between warriors and their societies in different cultures around the world. The multidisciplinary goal was to find commonalities among cultures while highlighting aspects which differ.

There is an extensive amount of literature on warfare, both from a military history<sup>1</sup> and an anthropological<sup>2</sup> perspective. However, we found there to be little cross-over between the two disciplines. The former is generally concerned with historical developments of weapons and tactics, the organization of large-scale armies of the state and the history of campaigns. Anthropologists more often examine small-scale societies and focus on such factors as ecology, psychology or sociobiology, which can be identified as fundamental causes

of the development and persistence of warfare. This oversimplified summary of the two disciplinary points of view underscores an initial difficulty we faced in developing this exhibit: finding common ground on which to present the artifacts in our collections. Some of our early discussions were based on the work of Paul Fussell,<sup>3</sup> a literary scholar and critic whose works focus on the experience of the individual soldier during the First and Second World Wars as reflected in the poetry and fiction that arose from those experiences. Also, of particular influence was the brilliant work of John Keegan and his approach to interpreting military history from the soldier's point of view in *The Face of Battle*.<sup>4</sup>

Our final storyline is presented in six thematic sections. The topics highlight issues of direct concern to the warrior as an individual and situates the warrior within the larger society, as well as locating him within the warrior culture. We also examine the changing ways in which warriors have reacted to the possibility of their own death — that is, changes in technology, tactics, and attitudes towards body and spiritual protection.

As we worked through this exhibit, issues arose that challenged both the exhibit content and the process by which it was being developed. These included: the value and problems of undertaking an interdisciplinary exhibit, the difficulty balancing the exhibit to ensure equal contributions by both disciplines and equanimity among the various cultures represented, representing other cultures, representation of women as combatants, finding artifacts that reflect the topics, and, finally, the concern that warriors not be presented as relics of the past. We believed the exhibit should provide insights about the warriors of contemporary societies.

This paper begins with a review of the goals and objectives of the exhibit and its components; the success of the exhibit hinges on how well these goals are conveyed to the visiting public. We then focus on the exhibit development process and discuss more fully the challenges outlined above. The paper concludes with an assessment of the process and our experiences working as part of a multidisciplinary team.

### **Exhibit Storyline**

The goal of the *Warriors* exhibit was to:

*give visitors the chance to consider the individual inside the uniform or behind the shield. What was life like for the warrior? How does*

*a warrior fit into his or her society? What is the impact of technology on the warrior?*

*Warriors will provide insights about combatants throughout time and raise questions about the relationship between warriors and their societies, past and present, and in different cultures around the world. The exhibition will address these questions through the use of artifacts, photographs, mannequins, video and dramatic full scale dioramas.*

This goal initiated a complex dialogue among the curators as we strove to balance the theoretical importance of the goal with the realities of our collections. The differences between the military history and ethnology artifacts and the types of information that accompany each made it important that we find ways of illustrating our goal, which allowed contributions from both disciplines. The six topical sections we developed followed from this dialogue.

### **Warrior in Society**

This section looks at the ways in which the warriors' position in a society reflect that society's political and social organization, economic system and religious beliefs. Uniforms, medals, "loot" or trophies, and other objects reflect the status of the warriors and society's opinion of them. This status is complex and may change over time or remain consistent in the face of great societal change. The feudal structures of Europe and Japan raised the knights and samurai to exalted social positions. Traditional warfare among the First Nations of the Plains was a contest of skill among individuals and a warrior's deeds became known to everyone. In Europe, by the 18th century, the common soldier was held in contempt by both officers and the civil population; even today the military endure an equivocal status. Among the Plains First Nations, the warrior tradition remains a prominent part of the culture.

"Way of the Warrior" examines training, codes of conduct and customs and traditions. Methods of recruiting and training the warrior has differed greatly among cultures throughout history. In many tribal societies, young men admired and emulated their warriors; in feudal societies military service was a legal contract between a warrior and his lord, king or emperor; in city-states, military service was an obligation of citizenship; and in modern nations-states, military service has been both compulsory and voluntary and remains a controversial issue today.

In large, complex societies young recruits are transformed into warriors by an intense but relatively short ordeal known as basic training. In tribal and feudal societies, warrior training was usually carried out under the guidance of a teacher, relative or family friend.

In all warrior societies, codes of conduct have developed to prepare the warrior for success on the battlefield and to ensure a peaceful transition back into society after the aggression and violence of war. The code of chivalry in feudal Europe and the code of *Bushido* among the samurai of Japan were ideal forms of behaviour that the warrior was taught to emulate.

Discipline has always been necessary in large-scale military forces to train the warrior effectively and to keep him from deserting during battle. Discipline was less of a problem when warriors remained fully integrated in their societies and were strongly motivated to defend their homes and families.

Warrior dress and adornment has always had a greater significance than just identification and protection from the elements. The warriors of the First Nations of the Plains painted their bodies and wore decorated war shirts both for spiritual reasons and to intimidate their enemies. The high mitre caps of 18th century European grenadier made them appear taller. The fierce masks of the samurai not only protected them from sword cuts but were intended to terrify their opponents.

In addition to dress, other important pieces of the complex warrior mosaic are music, colours and banners, and elaborate social and spiritual rituals. An interactive video in this section brings to life the "Way of the Warrior," with short segments on recruitment, training, music, and customs and traditions. A visual storage component highlights the bonds of regimental tradition through the badges and insignia of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment), including examples from affiliated regiments throughout the Commonwealth.

### **Body and Spiritual Armour**

War has always brought the warrior face to face with his own mortality. In an attempt to distance himself from this grim reality, he developed armour as a means of protection. "Body and Spiritual Armour" examines how armour became an integral part of the warrior's identity. Not only did it serve the utilitarian purpose of deflecting harmful blows, it also became a symbol of the warrior's position in society, both on and off the battlefield. The

elaborate construction and decoration of armour announced to everyone the wearer's wealth and status.

Every culture has expressed the belief that humans are more than just physical beings. Therefore, protection should not be limited to what can simply be worn on the body. Subscribing to such beliefs has led to the warriors' invocation of divine protection. The ways in which this was attempted were as varied as the cultures that employed them.

Physical and spiritual protection became enmeshed. The samurai warrior might have good luck symbols incorporated into the decoration on his armour, or the medieval knight might have had a crucifix etched on his breastplate. Amulets, talismans and inscriptions on both armour and weapons ensured not only protection from injury, but victory on the battlefield as well.

### **Technology and Tactics**

For the warrior, the introduction of new weapons and technology brings new opportunities and dangers. Survival depends on the adoption of new technology or changing tactics. The development of iron, and its subsequent use in weapons spelled defeat for those peoples who still used brass and copper for their swords and spears. The sword, the axe, the spear and the club were limited by the strength of the individual warrior and ensured that all warriors fought on fairly equal terms. The advent of the bow, cross-bow, and then firearms began to upset this balance. The ability to kill from a distance, and the production of the cannon, which could destroy fortifications, altered the nature of battle forever. Technical expertise, superior organization and supply became crucial factors. In the modern world, the warrior has become a technician and a specialist who can wage war under all conditions and in any environment.

### **Women as Combatants**

In most societies, women's involvement in conflict was confined to the supporting roles of nursing, gathering food, cooking and praying. This was true in both aboriginal and Western cultures. In addition to the supportive roles, women could often exert a powerful moral influence on the combatants, inspiring or shaming them to greater efforts.

There were exceptions and many women did join men on the battlefield, albeit disguised as males. Although celebrated in poetry and song, these women never represented an officially recognized force. The inclusion of

women in regular armies was common during the Second World War and was a logical progression of the advent of total war.

### Reflections

This small gallery at the end of the exhibit provides a space for the visitor to reflect on the ideas presented in the other sections. Mounted on the wall, juxtaposed with selected photographs, are short quotations — what warriors have said or written about themselves or other warriors and their response to war. A “letters home” album relates selected Canadian military experiences, from the Red River Expedition of 1869–70 to United Nations peacekeeping operations in Cambodia in 1993. A bulletin board is used to post clippings of current interest.

### Value of an Interdisciplinary Approach

It is important to distinguish between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary processes. Multidisciplinary exhibits draw on collections and knowledge from two or more disciplines to illustrate a thesis that has been constructed from one disciplinary point of view. An interdisciplinary approach brings to exhibit development not only artifacts and information from different disciplines, it can also foster a dialogue of the theoretical foundations underlying the areas of specialization. The disciplines that

contributed to *Warriors* include Ethnology, Military History, Education, Conservation, Design, and Audio-Visual Production. We will focus here on the exchange between the curatorial disciplines — Military History and Ethnology. The synergy created by working from two distinctive theoretical perspectives led each of us to reconsider our own understanding of the collections with which we work. Following, we discuss the effects of an interdisciplinary approach from each discipline's perspective.

### An Ethnological Perspective

As we began to match artifacts and label copy with the exhibit storyline it became apparent that the nature of our two collections was leading to different approaches to the storyline. In part, these differences are embedded in the history of the collections. The Military History collection is narrowly focussed, with a significant amount of information about the life histories of particular pieces. The Ethnology collection is more eclectic and includes more than militaria. Unfortunately, we often do not know the names of the original owners of weapons and there are few or incomplete records concerning the cultural contexts within which particular items were made and used. Secondary sources are often helpful, but my own work with the Blood and Peigan have shown me that these interpretations can be very misleading. Beyond collecting biases, the nature of the collections reflects underlying differences among the cultures that are represented.

Two sections are especially illustrative of these considerations. “The Warrior in Society” and “Way of the Warrior” are concerned with the way warriors fit within their societies and with the structure of warrior societies, respectively. In the former, Military History draws parallels between the hierarchical structure of society in general and the military organizations found in medieval Europe, early 20th-century Canada and feudal Japan. The fine uniforms of the officer, knight and nobleman are contrasted with the less opulent arms and armour of the regular soldier. Not surprisingly, the officers were generally drawn from the educated and the elite of society while the lower classes supplied most of the soldiers. Rank was ascribed as much as it was earned.

The Ethnology material is structured very differently. Symbols of success were earned and owned by individuals based on their behaviour on the field of battle. Although the

**Fig. 1**  
Section of a Blood tipi  
painted with pictographs  
of war exploits. (Courtesy  
Glenbow Museum,  
P-4585-5B)



symbols of success, such as war exploits drawn on a tipi or particular kinds of clothing, may have been somewhat standardized, the particular meanings behind those symbols varied among individuals. Thus, when viewing the Blood war tipi (Fig. 1) it is clear that the stories are being told in a culturally defined set of symbols. The stories cannot be read unless one knows the identity of the author and his life history. This information would have been readily available to others in a camp. If someone else had the tipi design transferred to him, it was not to achieve the status and prestige of a successful warrior. Rather, such transfers brought with them the power of the spiritual blessings that enabled previous owners to be successful in battle. The assignment of rank among the Military History "cultures" does not carry with it a similar concept of spiritual assistance.

The relative embeddedness of spirituality and the ability to understand the symbolism of warrior customs is further illustrated in the exhibit's discussion of training, codes of conduct and customs and traditions ("Way of the Warrior"). The Military History collections include several examples of tools used to train warriors in the use of weapons (e.g., a cut-away Enfield rifle and wooden practice sabres). Other aspects of training include the recognition of the uniform badges and decorations by which one individual can situate another within the armed forces. Codes of conduct are strictly enforced and a number of punishment devices (e.g., the deserter's tattoo and the cat-o'-nine-tails) have been developed. Elaborate service customs such as ceremonial parades, uniform distinctions and mess traditions help recruits identify with their unit or branch of service and establish the morale and comradeship essential to their performance and survival on the battlefield.

The Ethnology collections speak to very little within this section. Training usually involved no special equipment, but focussed on more general life skills and a respect for the spiritual help that would be necessary for survival. The age-grade and other societies to which young men belonged were seldom exclusively military and usually had no overtly military paraphernalia. Punishment was by social sanction and when physical abuse was rendered, no special tools were used.

The differing nature of these collections, knowledge about them, and the ways in which they can be discussed may be attributed to the disciplinary perspective each of us brought to

the exhibit. I suspect, however, that these differences also tell something important about the fundamental nature of the societies from which the artifacts originated. The Military History collections are derived from literate societies with complex social organizations and extensive societal segmentation (i.e., religious vs material realms, military vs civilian and nobleman vs commoner). In contrast, the Ethnology material represents societies which were traditionally oral-based cultures (although all are now fully literate). Among these people the sacred and the profane are linked inextricably and social boundaries are more fluid. Anthropologist Jack Goody<sup>5</sup> has offered cogent arguments concerning the effects of literacy on an increasingly complex and segmented social organization. Working on *Warriors* often demonstrated the material-culture expressions of these differences. It is an avenue of inquiry that bears much closer scrutiny.

The real value of research lies more in the questions raised than in the answers provided. The interdisciplinary approach of the *Warriors* exhibit led the curators to approach their collections in quite different ways. By comparing these approaches and by questioning the information provided by each other, I think we may be able to identify some fundamental differences among the cultures represented in these collections. The challenge then became finding a voice to balance and engage the different cultures in a dialogue. Without this engagement, such exhibits become multidisciplinary showcases rather than truly interdisciplinary discussions.

### **The Military History Perspective**

As discussed above, the viewpoint of the Military History collecting area reflects that of the societies from which it draws its collections. These are often similar to one another — a knight in feudal Europe would have recognized the social position of a samurai warrior in feudal Japan; a private soldier in the 18th-century British army had a similar experience to his counterpart in the Austrian army of the same period. They were (and are) the creation of large-scale, complex societies with established, rigid hierarchies. With the decline of the feudal system and the rise of specialized divisions of labour, the peasant-warrior was replaced by the mercenary and then the professional. Unlike warriors in small-scale, hunter-gatherer cultures, the warrior in Euro-Asian societies was paid and ceased to rely on hunting or agrarian skills for his subsistence.

**Fig. 2**  
A full Japanese armour  
made for a high-ranking  
samurai, 19th century.  
(Courtesy Glenbow  
Museum, P-4239-111)



Within these parameters, comparisons among the warrior cultures represented in the military collections were readily achieved. In "Warrior and Society," for example, the identity of the warrior in various societies was easily exhibited using uniforms and armour (Fig. 2). The difference in rank, and thus the relative social position of the warrior in his society, is readily indicated by the juxtaposition of the costumes and armour of the officers and the common soldiers. Another level of interpretation in this section conveys differences between the professional warrior class, the citizen-soldier, the mercenary, and the new role of the warrior as UN peacekeeper. Throughout the exhibit, the Military History collections were easily adapted to the chosen themes. Through many discussions with my Ethnology colleagues, it became evident where interdisciplinary approaches would work and where they would not. In difficult sections, however, the very nature of our concerns probably underline the differences in the disciplines.

Although many of our discussion resulted in noting (and exhibiting) the differences rather than similarities between the two collections, the spiritualism inherent in all warrior cultures allowed us to find and develop a common ground resulting in the section on "Body and Spiritual Armour." The importance of spiritualism and its integration into the everyday life

of the warrior in small-scale societies motivated me to search for parallel examples of spiritual armour in the military collection. The results were rewarding. In addition to religious material such as Christian bibles, a Jewish prayer book, and an Islamic Koran used by a Dervish warrior in the Sudan, material such as a knight's breastpiece inscribed with the crucifix, a samurai armour embossed with a likeness of a Buddhist deity, and Turkish weapons engraved with prayers for victory are effectively exhibited with First Nations shields and Maori weapons endowed with spiritual protective powers. While other sections in the exhibit amplify the differences in technology and organization between the warriors, spirituality provides a common link.

### Balance

As the *Warriors* exhibit development proceeded, questions of balance arose. Balance within a multidisciplinary exhibit can be expressed in several ways. First, there is the issue of balancing the number of artifacts so that each discipline has approximately equal numbers, in each section, and throughout the entire exhibit. Second, space must be balanced so that each discipline is allocated a similar number of square metres. Third, visibility and the display techniques used must ensure equal prominence for each discipline. Fourth, each discipline may have to balance the cultures represented within its collections. Finally, curators should be given the opportunity to explore fully their disciplines' understanding of the topic. Ethnologists face the additional challenge of finding a balance between the curatorial voice and the culture of which they write. Within the overall exhibit, these balances must be presented as a cohesive whole in such a way that equity is achieved without overpowering the storyline.

The first four concerns address the sense of public balance in which both of the collections are highlighted to illustrate to the public that a broad spectrum of artifacts from a variety of cultures have been collected by the museum. This is important, especially for museum boards and administrators who are, rightly, concerned with the image of their museums as interesting places with diverse collections. These issues of balance speak to the *multidisciplinary* nature of the exhibit.

The *interdisciplinary* aspect of an exhibit is addressed only when the curators from different disciplines engage in a dialogue. The

artifacts then become concrete examples, illustrating points within a discussion. A truly interdisciplinary storyline will include questions asked by each discipline — questions that pertain to a particular knowledge base but that lead everyone to look at their collections and artifacts in new and different ways.

*Warriors* is successful in achieving balance in this interdisciplinary sense. The storyline, goals and themes were developed jointly by Ethnology and Military History curators. The discussions focussed on finding an approach that would include issues of common concern. An anthropological perspective was taken on Military History collections while ethnologists took an unorthodox view of their own collections. Neither discipline assumed a primacy role by dictating the focus or defining the key issues.

In spite of this fundamental balance, the equity may not be apparent to the museum visitor. The Military History collections dominate the exhibit, both overall and within particular sections. The Military History label copy is longer and more personal than that which accompanies ethnological artifacts. This creates a greater physical presence and inspires emotion in the visitors. The major walk-through diorama features scenes from a medieval castle, reinforcing the impressions that *Warriors* is a Military History exhibit.

This imbalance arose from the nature of Glenbow's collections and the nature of the cultures from which we have collected. As already noted, the Ethnology collection is more diverse than that of Military History and includes more than just warrior paraphernalia. The Ethnology data base for *Warriors* was smaller than the Military History base. Many objects worn in battle may be part of our sacred collection. Out of respect for First Nations cultures, we exhibit such objects only with permission of appropriate representatives of these cultures. We extend this restriction to other cultures whenever we feel it is appropriate, or upon request. However, spirituality and warfare are tied together very closely and we may have been denied the opportunity to exhibit significant items in our displays. Without these objects, our discussion of the link between spirituality and warfare can be limited. The Military History collection has few similar restrictions and, therefore, presents a broader, more complete discussion of warriors.

From the Military History perspective, it is always of paramount importance to represent as many units and branches of service as

possible. Because the focus of *Warriors* was restricted to combatants, support units such as supply, medical and transport were excluded. However, a representational balance was desirable between components such as infantry, cavalry, armour, artillery, air force and navy. To reflect the international nature of the collections, representation was sought from European, Canadian, North African, Mid-Eastern, Indian and Asian military forces. Finally, the balance between officers and men was essential to the exhibit, particularly in the "Warrior and Society" section.

There is a further imbalance within the ethnological groupings as some cultures and culture areas are over-represented (e.g. Plains First Nations), while others are under-represented (e.g., Africa and South America). Glenbow ethnologists are engaged in continuous, first-hand research among the First Nations of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. This has increased our understanding of the ideology and nature of warfare and of the attitudes and concerns of First Nations warriors. This primary research has also inculcated a skepticism about generalizing anthropological summaries of non-Western cultures. Most cultural anthropologists do not focus on the material culture that accompanies various practices or that indicates status positions. This makes it difficult to tell accurate stories about the artifacts without undertaking an exhaustive deconstruction of anthropological texts. These deconstructions will be undertaken with less confidence as the culture under scrutiny becomes more remote from the curator's experience. We tend to stick with what we know, and this has brought an imbalance to the exhibit.

### Representing Other Cultures

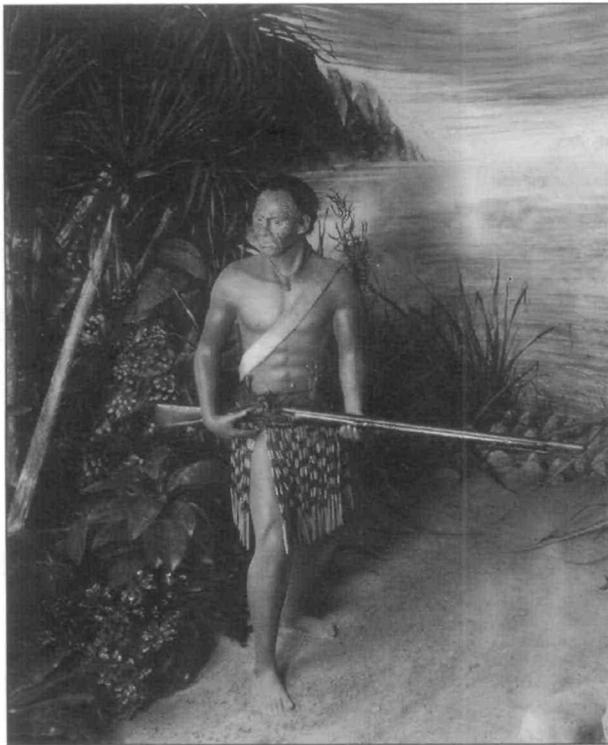
Museums have become a focal point of the debate surrounding the representation of minority (dominated) cultures within institutions of the majority (dominating) culture.<sup>6</sup> This is a reflection of broader educational<sup>7</sup> and anthropological<sup>8</sup> efforts to present multiple perspectives on history. The developments at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump,<sup>9</sup> Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon, and the Royal Saskatchewan Museum<sup>10</sup> illustrate the role that First Nations advisors can play in the development of exhibit themes, objectives and even text.

*Warriors* faced the challenge of presenting objects from both non-Western cultures and from different periods of time. As Lowenthal<sup>11</sup>

points out, the latter can be a more daunting task than the former, since a researcher may be able to approach members of a non-Western culture for their own emic<sup>12</sup> understanding or cultural insights. It is more difficult to elicit such information from medieval knights.

In trying to present non-Western points of view, we turned to the First Nations of western Canada. Glenbow has developed links with these nations and, through our First Nations Advisory Council (FNAC),<sup>13</sup> has an established protocol for exhibit review. Discussions with FNAC included reviews of the concepts and objectives of each part of the exhibit as well as detailed discussions of the artifact list. We were concerned that we understood the First Nations perspectives on war and on the objects we had selected for the exhibit. From this process we learned that traditional warfare was considered to be a test of strength, not a killing ground. Further research has shown us that the political relationships among First Nations was very complex; some bands of Cree, for example, may have been at war with some bands of Siksika, while their relatives in other bands remained at peace. These complex relationships, and the implications for individual warriors, has been largely glossed over by non-Native traders, explorers, historians and anthropologists.

**Fig. 3**  
Diorama of a Maori standing guard outside his pa. Note the mixture of European and traditional weapons and dress. (Courtesy Glenbow Museum, P-4622-3)



We also conducted a special review of the exhibit with a group of Peigan.<sup>14</sup> A design concept had been put forward in which one introductory wall was to be covered with the word “warrior” in different languages. Our discussions with the Peigan focussed on the Black-foot translation. We suggested that *knats-omitax*, the word for the Brave Dog Society, be used. It was made clear to us that the Brave Dogs were the camp police and that anyone could initiate or accompany a war party. Roles within the party were strictly defined, based upon one’s ownership of sacred bundles, previous experiences and dreams. This is an important distinction and illuminates many writings which consider these men’s societies to be parts of age-graded warrior societies. Again, the culture is more complex than it has generally been portrayed.

It is a Peigan tradition that, during some ceremonies, an elder is called upon to recount four of his brave deeds before certain parts of the ceremony are performed. We wanted to confirm that this “counting of coups” was a way of publicly honouring the elder. The Peigans pointed out that whoever told his stories did so in a humble manner and ended each tale with the prayer asking that the blessing that had carried him to safety be shared by all who listened to his story. “Counting coups” is not an act of social posturing or bravado. Rather, it is an open admission that people are successful because of the support of spiritual helpers. This enlightened our understanding of a specific aspect of their culture and emphasized the subtle and important ways in which Native and non-Native views affect our understanding of the world.

As some of our embedded assumptions about Native cultures were dispelled, we began to wonder about our representation of other cultures. The exhibit includes cultures from around the world over a span of almost 5 000 years. How well do we understand the Maori reaction to the British invasion, as depicted in one of our life-size dioramas (Fig. 3)? What symbolism underlies the elaborately feathered bow of the Urburu of the upper Amazon? How did the samurai deal with the tension of balancing the arts of war with the arts of peace? These important questions remain unanswered in *Warriors*. In our effort to present what we considered to be basic information, we have been unable to lead the visitor to view the world differently — through the culturally defined worldview of various warriors.

### **Finding the Artifact to Fit the Subject**

The storyline of *Warriors* is concerned more with human behaviour and cultural ideals than with technological developments or the physical structure of warrior material culture. As we developed the exhibit, we were confronted with the challenge of translating or finding ways of attaching the abstract themes of the storyline to the tangible objects in our collection. We believe that these themes raise important issues about the status and nature of warriors and we were reluctant to manipulate the objectives to fit our collection.

In some instances it was very easy to match objects to themes. The displays of medals awarded for service and loot given as a reward for successful campaigns demonstrate the ways in which a society regards their warriors. Similarly, comparisons of officers' and enlisted men's uniforms easily illustrate how class distinctions within a larger society are transposed into the military. The section of the exhibit which features the technology of warrior society was most easily linked to artifacts and presents an array of weaponry from around the world.

While there was often an obvious link between an artifact and a topic, sometimes there was a need to develop more fully the cultural context of the object. A tipi with pictographic accounts of war exploits is, clearly, a way in which Blood men were honoured for their bravery. However, the nuances regarding ownership of the designs, the public display of the accounts, and the transferred rights that accompany the tipi set this object apart from, say, Canadian Service Medals, as a way in which society acknowledges its warriors. Blood culture must be discussed extensively to ensure that visitors appreciate the differences between these two cultures. Similarly, the code of *Bushido* held by the samurai needs to be contextualized.

Sometimes, it was impossible to provide full explanations within a reasonable label copy space. The imagery on First Nations shields, for example, has multiple and complex layers of cultural and personal symbolism. The meaning of many symbols was lost with the original owner; other meanings may not be understandable to those who do not share the worldview of a particular First Nation. Even the concept that these shields are animate and carry with them power can be very difficult for non-Natives understand. Concepts such as this are not prevalent in all of the societies represented in *Warriors* and it is this sort of distinction among the cultures that is important to the exhibit.

A creative tension developed from this struggle to fit the artifact to the theme and to explain abstract concepts without overburdening the exhibit with text. The curatorial approach, often, is to write a book and hang it on the wall as exhibit text copy. We all know how visually uninviting this is and how discouraging it is to the visitor. We have tried to steer away from this, and a layering of information gives the visitor the option of reading different amounts of detail. Important points are in large type and are no more than 50 words. More detailed information may run up to 150 words; it is printed in a smaller point size. We have yet to determine how well we have succeeded. We suspect, however, that our approach required a particularly innovative designer who could appreciate and understand the multi-layered and multi-faceted nature of the topic.

### **Representing Women As Combatants**

From the first curatorial meetings on the exhibit, we knew we wanted to include the story of women as warriors. How best to tell the story became the subject of some debate.

At the time of our initial discussions, the curatorial team of four included one woman — a curatorial assistant in the Military History Department. She was particularly concerned with the way we intended to approach and develop the story of women in battle — whether to integrate women's experiences into the main exhibit storyline at the risk of it becoming lost in the predominant male culture; or to create a distinct section in the show to feature women warriors and thus possibly over-represent their role as combatants? After considerable discussion, the curators decided to solicit opinions from the female members (about 60 per cent) of the Glenbow staff. They responded overwhelmingly in favour of producing a distinct section of the show to feature women as combatants.

Once we had decided on an approach to the issue, we had to find the artifacts to represent the story. Photographs were available in abundance but artifacts were almost non-existent. We decided to build the section around the display of a mannequin representing a woman fighter in the Yugoslavian partisans during the Second World War. This was a relatively simple task since the costume could be fabricated and the weapons were readily available. The mannequin was exhibited in juxtaposition with a Canadian Women's Army Corps uniform and an RCAF (Women's Division) uniform. This

arrangement would represent the female combatant in contrast with the non-combatant (but equally important) Canadian women in uniform during the same period.

While photographs and a mannequin dressed in a recreated costume enhanced the section, it did not satisfactorily represent the substance of the theme. The challenge became locating documented artifacts that would equitably represent the story of women in battle. The search began with the Central Museum of the Armed Forces in Moscow and the Abshalom Institute in Tel Aviv, Israel. Three museums in the Russian Federation were contacted in addition to the Jewish Museum in New York City and several veteran's groups. Although all were supportive of the idea and two had artifacts representing women combatants, only one offered to loan us this rare material. The primary condition of the loan, and one that we could not meet, was for a museum representative to travel to Moscow and select the artifacts. At a late stage in the exhibit development we were faced with the grim prospect of dropping the section. Fortunately, the Polish Combatant Association in Calgary, who had been searching for material on our behalf, contacted us with the names of two women who had been fighters in the Polish Home Army and participated in the ill-fated Warsaw Uprising of August–September 1944. Mrs Marta Mankowski and Mrs Hanna Beeger (Fig. 4) came to our aid and kindly loaned us their personal photographs, identity cards and insignia, including a Home Army armband which was their only uniform. In addition, they both graciously

consented to share their personal experiences in interviews which were published in the *Warriors* edition of the *Glenbow* magazine.

At present, we have only the comment cards with which to measure the success of the "Women as Combatants" section. None of the comments which specifically mention the section have been adverse and few have mentioned the gender issue. One irate visitor, however, left an unsigned card which was critical of a quote by General George S. Patton in the "Reflections" section. He or she suggested that the initial "S" in Patton's name probably stood for "sexist" and added that men start wars and women and children suffer the results. Our visitor went on to comment favourably on the fact that we had included a section on women as combatants.

### The "Dead Culture" Issue

As discussed above, one of the rewarding features of interdisciplinary exhibitions for curators is the opportunity to look at their own collections in different ways. The Ethnology curators are concerned that the public may harbour the misconception that the cultures represented in these collections have long since disappeared. As Western material culture spreads throughout the world, it is assumed by many that the acculturation process has been complete. In fact, many indigenous cultures are vibrant and others are undergoing a resurgence. While survival is often expressed in terms of spirituality, generally no distinction can be made among different aspects of these cultures. As we have observed in the discussion of "coups," the linkage of warrior elements with spiritual and other aspects of the culture has perpetuated the importance of the essence of being a warrior as a feature of one's cultural identity and self-esteem. In *Warriors* we attempted to convey the significance of the warrior traditions and its survival as part of cultural survival.

For the Military History curator, this thinking offered an opportunity to present the military "cultures" in the exhibit, (particularly the modern Canadian Forces) as an ongoing, vibrant and alive culture and not as anachronistic relics of a dead culture. Thus, our visitors' attention is drawn to the current customs and traditions of the Forces. Trooping the colour, mess dinners, and Freedom of the City parades are not presented as curiosities of the past but as vital and relevant elements of a dynamic military culture. To underscore this idea, a bulletin board

**Fig. 4**  
Hanna Beeger (left) and Marta Mankowski reflect on their wartime experiences as combatants with the Polish Home Army. (Courtesy Glenbow Museum, P-4610-3)



in the "Reflections" section displays current clippings and articles germane to the life of the warrior in the 1990s.

## Conclusion

*Warriors* is an ambitious exhibit. Through it, we merged two collections representing cultures from around the world and across five centuries. The conceptual framework focusses on warriors as people and examines the relationships that developed among warriors, between warriors and their society, and between warriors and their worldviews. This structure necessitates a multi-layered reading of the artifacts, which themselves are understood to be complex codifications of social norms and expectations. By asking our visitors to view the artifacts in new and different ways, we were also expecting them to re-examine their preconceptions about warriors — from all societies.

It may be premature to discuss the successes and/or failures of the exhibit; we have yet to undertake a summative evaluation. Still, a collection of over 1 000 comment cards and two critical reviews<sup>15</sup> provide us with a measure of insight into the way the exhibit is being received. One review<sup>16</sup> questions the values underlying the exhibit development and is concerned with the absence of any commentary regarding the nature of war as a conflict resolution process or the moral differences of a Salvadoran guerilla and a United States marine in Vietnam. Similar feelings have been expressed by visitors who wonder why we are glorifying war.

We have also received praise for presenting warriors in an enlightened context. Some visitors who approached the exhibit with reluctance discovered their own empathy for the individuals in the uniform. One need not love war to be concerned with the warrior. Many of the points of praise focussed on particular aspects of the exhibit: the samurai; the medieval armour; and the First Nations artifacts. It may be a characteristic of comment cards that respondents highlight features that they particularly like or dislike. It may also reflect a visitor pattern in which people come to see certain classes of objects.

This response pattern may also indicate a fundamental failure. *Warriors* is an interdisciplinary exhibit combining the artifacts, knowledge, and points of view of Ethnology and Military History. The public seems not to be responding to this mix of perspectives. I have yet to find any respondents who remarked specifically upon the juxtaposition of cultures. Perhaps this exhibition strategy is nothing strange to a museum visitor, harking back as it does to museum displays of an earlier era.<sup>17</sup> We were concerned that cultural identity not be lost and so were careful to separate items by their origin. As a result, we may have lost a sense of commonality and with it the point that warriors are found in nearly all cultures and share many of the same concerns.

The interdisciplinary team approach is an invaluable strategy. As we move on to other exhibits at Glenbow, the lessons we have learned from *Warriors* will stimulate more creative and innovative explorations of ideas and artifacts.

## NOTES

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  13. Members of Glenbow's First Nations Advisory Council are Larry Asapace (Cree), Harold Healy (Blood), Rita Marten (Cree), Wilson Okeymaw (Cree), Pat Provost (Peigan), Jeanette Starlight (Tsuu t'ina) and Russell Wright (Siksika). The Council is generously supported by a grant from AMOCO (Canada) Ltd.
  14. We wish to thank Reg Crow Shoe for arranging the meeting, Joe Crow Shoe and Josephine Crow Shoe openly shared their knowledge and wisdom with us.
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