might say. In order to be independent, you have to do things that are considered illegal. There's no way we should be left defenceless in this day and age. Nobody else will defend us, so we have to defend ourselves.”

CHAPTER 7
Romans of the New World

A Military History of the Mohawks

Hundreds of years before Europeans arrived in North America, the Iroquois people were already developing the art of warfare. It began as a deadly sport for idle men. In some ways, it was a byproduct of the unique organization of Iroquois society. Their farming economy (based on the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash) was controlled by the women, who harvested enough food to sustain the entire culture. The Iroquois men were therefore free to develop their own pursuits—hunting, politics, diplomacy, and warfare—travelling great distances, often leaving their villages for long periods of time. Their absence was tolerable because it was the women who sustained the economy and ultimately guided the matrilineal structure of Iroquois society.

Military conflicts among the Iroquois were originally a kind of masculine game, almost an athletic competition. The battles were undisciplined and casualties were low. But soon they degenerated into a ceaseless series of blood feuds. War parties were organized to settle scores—usually to gain revenge for the killing of a family member. Feuds, which often began with an accidental death, would mushroom into a chronic state of war. Cannibalism was one outgrowth of the feuds, and archeologists have found evidence that this practice existed among the Iroquois from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

It was in the darkest years of this troubled period that the great
Peacemaker emerged. His name was Deganawidah, and he was born in a Huron village near the Bay of Quinte on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. (The legendary site of his birthplace can be found today in the Mohawk community of Tyendinaga, west of the city of Kingston.) There are several different versions of the Iroquois legends about the Peacemaker, but they all describe him as the son of a virgin mother. When he grew to manhood, he carved a canoe from white rock and paddled off on a great journey.

Deganawidah crossed to the southern side of the lake and arrived in the land of the Iroquois, which was torn apart by violence and despair. They looked at him curiously because he carried no weapon. Deganawidah told the Iroquois that he was a messenger sent by the Creator to establish the Great Law among them. He described the Good Tidings of Peace and Power, and he promised that warfare would be banished among the Iroquois nations. The people were skeptical, and so he offered a test of his own powers. He climbed to the top of a tall tree, near a waterfall on the Mohawk River, and asked that the tree be chopped down. When he plunged into the chasm below the waterfall, the Iroquois thought he was dead, but the next morning they found him alive, sitting quietly by his fire in a cornfield.

The odyssey of Deganawidah was long and difficult. He travelled from settlement to settlement, trying to spread his message of Peace and Power. One day he came to the home of “the man who eats humans” — a notorious cannibal, feared by everyone, who lived alone because his wife and children had been killed in a blood feud. Deganawidah climbed to the roof of the house and waited. The man soon returned to his home, carrying a human body, and put his kettle on the fire. Deganawidah looked through the smoke hole into the house, and the cannibal saw a strange face reflected in the water of the kettle. He thought it was his own face, but he saw wisdom and strength and righteousness in the face. Amazed by the transformation, he decided he was a new man. “Now I have changed my habits,” he said. “I no longer kill humans and eat their flesh.”

According to some versions of the Peacemaker legend, this man was the first disciple of Deganawidah. His name was Hiawatha. (Centuries later, his name was mistakenly used by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his famous poem about the Ojibway Indians.) For many years, Hiawatha and Deganawidah travelled across the Iroquois ter-
operations, and often exercised as much influence as the peace chiefs.

For centuries, the Iroquois Confederacy has followed the rules of the Great Law of Peace. Whenever a condoled chief dies or is removed from office because of misconduct, he is replaced by another chief in a condolence ceremony. It is the clan mothers who choose the chiefs and decide whether a chief should be removed from office. The clan mothers themselves are chosen by the women of their clan. The choice is confirmed by the women of the other clans, and then by the men of all the clans. Finally, the chosen women are condoled in a formal ceremony in the Longhouse.

The Great Council still exists today, and continues to meet at the Onondaga reservation in upper New York State. In recent decades, however, serious disagreements have arisen concerning the legitimacy of some of the condolence ceremonies. Condoled positions have been plagued by confusion and duplication, and some Iroquois communities have not held condolence ceremonies for decades. The authority of the Confederacy chiefs has been thrown into question. Much of the decision-making power has shifted to the village chiefs (also known as subchiefs) who serve as the local Longhouse council in each Iroquois community.

Because of the complex philosophy of peace and justice that underlies the Great Law, the Iroquois were sometimes called “the Romans of the New World.” Benjamin Franklin was fascinated by the federal structure of the Confederacy, and it probably had some influence on his contributions to the American Constitution. Karl Marx praised the Great Law because it operated without any police, jails, monarchies or aristocracies.

Under this system, the people are the source of all power. The chiefs are simply representatives, chosen because it is impossible for all of the people to attend every Longhouse meeting. Decisions are made by consensus, and the principles of equality and individual autonomy are cherished. Nobody is permitted to rule an Iroquois community by coercion or divine right. In dramatic contrast to the Christian societies of Europe and North America, the Iroquois have no concept of hierarchy or blind obedience to authority.

To ensure that the chiefs do not abuse their position, the Great Law was based on a system of checks and balances. The clan mothers are always alert for any violations of the Great Law by the chiefs. “Women thus had great power, for not only could they nominate their rulers but also depose them for incompetency in office,” the Seneca anthropologist Arthur Parker wrote in 1916. “Here, then, we find the right of popular nomination, the right of recall and of women’s suffrage, all flourishing in the old America of the Red Man and centuries before it became the clamor of the new America of the white invader. Who now shall call Indians and Iroquois savages!”

Another crucial principle of the Confederacy is the concept of unity and strength. In Wampum 57 of the Great Law, the image of five arrows bound together is the symbol of this unity. Each arrow represents one of the five nations of the Confederacy. Because they are bound together, the five arrows are so strong that they cannot be broken.

The Longhouse is another symbol of the Confederacy. The five nations are perceived as a family, living together in the same lodge. The Mohawks, the farthest east of the five nations, are the Keepers of the Eastern Door of this symbolic Longhouse. The Senecas, who dwell the farthest west, are the Keepers of the Western Door, while the Onondagas are the keepers of the Central Fire because they are situated in the centre.

The Mohawks were always among the strongest and most powerful of the nations in the Confederacy. Although their population was relatively small and spread over a large territory, their military discipline and skill in warfare gave them a prominent role. Along with the Senecas and Onondagas, they were the “Elder Brothers” of the Confederacy. They held a veto over the decisions of the Great Council and had a tremendous influence on the Confederacy’s decisions, especially those relating to war and foreign affairs. Because of their position at the eastern door, the Mohawks were also the first to experience any extended contact with Europeans: they enjoyed the most lucrative trade (and endured the fiercest battles) with the European intruders.

The Confederacy itself had a military purpose as well as a peaceful one. The Great Law contemplated the expansion of the Confederacy to bring peace and justice to neighbouring Indian nations, symbolized in the second wampum of the Great Law by the roots of the Great Tree of Peace growing and stretching to the surrounding territories. If a nation refused to accept a request to join the Confederacy, the Great
Law authorized the Iroquois to conquer their neighbour by military tactics, forcing it to join the Confederacy.

The establishment of the Great Law was successful in its objective of ending warfare within the Confederacy: the five nations ceased fighting each other. But at the same time it broadened the scope of Iroquois warfare, authorizing full-scale wars with foreign enemies. Organized warfare against outsiders became a substitute for the deadly rituals and blood feuds between individual clans and families.

"The Iroquois reputation for pertinacity and ruthlessness in fighting with their external enemies may be regarded as an indirect consequence of the blocking of the blood feud among the participating members of the League," anthropologist Anthony Wallace has written. "The *pax Iroquois* resulted in the displacement of revenge motivations outward, onto surrounding peoples, Indian and European alike."

When the Europeans first arrived in the St. Lawrence Valley in the sixteenth century, the Mohawks were primarily interested in trading with them to obtain European goods. However, that trade was controlled by other Indian nations — including the Algonquins and a little-known tribe of Iroquoians who lived in the villages of Hochelaga and Stadacona near the present-day sites of Montreal and Quebec City. Shortly after the European arrival, Mohawk war parties began to launch raids against the Algonquins and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians to plunder their trade goods and gain control of the region.

By the early years of the seventeenth century, the Mohawks and other Iroquois warriors were fighting the Algonquins, the Huron and the Montagnais in the St. Lawrence Valley. The Mohawks were experienced warriors and they posed a real threat to their enemies. But when Samuel de Champlain arrived in the St. Lawrence Valley to establish a trading post in 1608, he gave military help to his Indian trading partners in their war against the Iroquois.

In a famous battle that took place in 1609, Champlain and two other French musketeers helped an expedition of Algonquins, Hurons and Montagnais defeat a raiding party of about two hundred Mohawk warriors. Following the usual tradition, the Mohawks had arranged the combat in a formal meeting with the Montagnais chiefs a day earlier.

On the day of the battle, three chiefs led the Mohawk warriors in an orderly advance toward the enemy. Champlain simply raised his gun and fired at the chiefs, killing two of them and wounding the third, despite the arrow-proof armour they were wearing. When the battle was over, about fifty of the Mohawks had been killed. The Mohawks had never encountered guns before.

The battle of 1609 taught the Mohawks the importance of some new military tactics: mobility, ambushes, surprise attacks, and guerrilla warfare. Sometimes they would pretend to retreat, luring their enemy into a trap, then turning and charging at the Europeans with short spears and war clubs before any guns could be fired.

Eventually the Mohawks withdrew from the St. Lawrence Valley and began to trade with the Dutch, who had established a trading post at Albany on the Hudson River in 1615. Seeking control of the region around that post, the Mohawks fought a lengthy battle with the Mahican Indians. At first, the Dutch helped the Mahicans, but after four years of warfare the Mohawks won a decisive victory and forced the Mahicans to flee eastward. They refused to let any other Indians trade at Albany, and the Mohawks were so powerful that the Dutch were forced to accept this Mohawk monopoly.

In 1645, the Mohawks and the Dutch signed a treaty of peace and friendship, known as the Two Row Wampum Treaty because the Mohawks used the symbolism of two parallel rows on a wampum (a beaded belt) to represent their relationship with the Dutch. The two rows represented the Dutch and Mohawk nations, each independent and autonomous, never interfering with the path of the other. The treaty was often summarized by the symbolism of a canoe and a ship, the canoe representing the Mohawks and the ship representing the Dutch, both travelling side by side, each never steering into the other and always respecting the independence of the other.

The treaty of 1645 set down the principles of Indian sovereignty which were incorporated into subsequent treaties between the Europeans and the Iroquois. Each side — the Dutch and the Mohawk — agreed to respect the boundaries and political systems of the other and to refrain from meddling in the affairs of the other. By establishing the principle of non-interference, the Two Row Wampum Treaty was following a basic rule of international relations, implicitly recognizing
that the Mohawks were a nation by international standards. The Iroquois have never abandoned this concept, even in the modern era.

In the early decades of the seventeenth century, the French and the Dutch had refused to sell guns to the Indians because they feared their own safety would be jeopardized if the Indians possessed muskets. But around 1639, the Mohawks succeeded in purchasing guns and ammunition from English traders in the Connecticut Valley. The Dutch quickly followed by selling their own guns to the Mohawks. By 1644, the Mohawks had enough muskets to equip four hundred of their eight hundred warriors, and the other Iroquois nations also had guns, although not nearly as many as the Mohawks. The new firearms gave the Mohawks and their Iroquois allies “a considerable psychological advantage over their enemies,” historian Bruce Trigger has written. “It is likely that it was this psychological advantage, rather than any intrinsic superiority of guns over bows and arrows, that explains the success of the Iroquois.”

The French responded to this development by supplying muskets to their Huron trading partners. But the Jesuits insisted that guns could only be sold to Indians who had been baptized, and thus the Hurons were never as well armed as the Mohawks. Within a few years, the Mohawks were conducting regular raids into Huron and Algonquin territory in the St. Lawrence Valley, seizing furs and European trade goods.

The raids were a natural outgrowth of Mohawk culture in this period. Although there was a total of only three thousand Mohawks in North America in the 1640s, warriors made up almost one-quarter of the population. The Mohawks had cultivated the skills of warfare, rather than the entrepreneurial skills that were well developed among the Hurons and other Indian nations. So they waged war, instead of trading furs and other valuables, to obtain European goods.

Throughout this period, the Mohawks won a series of military victories over the Hurons, ending with a campaign in 1649 in which a war party of a thousand Mohawk and Seneca warriors destroyed two Huron villages. This led to the defeat and dispersal of the Hurons, some of whom voluntarily joined the Iroquois and were adopted into Iroquois families. This became a pattern for many of the defeated enemies of the Iroquois. Thousands of Hurons, Eries, Petuns, Neutrals, Algonquins, Susquehannocks and other Indians were absorbed into Iroquois society during the second half of the seventeenth century, thus strengthening the Confederacy further.

After their victory over the Hurons, the Iroquois began to travel widely over a huge territory. In the winter of 1649-50, they raided and hunted in northern Ontario for the first time. They attacked the Nipissing Indians and then roamed the shores of Georgian Bay, engaging in battles with the Hurons and Algonquins. This region became an important source of beaver skins for the Iroquois, who traded the pelts to the Dutch. In the early 1650s, they attacked and dispersed the Neutrals and the Eries. This allowed them to raid and hunt in the Ohio Valley, far to the west of their traditional territory. They also roamed as far east as Tadoussac and as far north as Lake Mistassini in what is now northern Quebec.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, warfare had become a way of life for the Iroquois. Many of their ceremonies — including the war feast, the war dance, and the white dog sacrifice — reflected the continuing importance of warfare in their culture. As they became embroiled in military alliances with the colonial powers, the Iroquois war chiefs soon became more influential than the peace chiefs, who were unable to control the Iroquois warriors. The Europeans came to regard the war chiefs as the true leaders of the Iroquois nations, and it was normally the war chiefs, rather than the peace chiefs, who signed treaties with European officials.

The Iroquois gained a frightening reputation as bloodthirsty warriors. Centuries after the conflicts of the seventeenth century, French Canadian parents could still hush their children at night by warning them of the terrors of “les Iroquois.” And of all the Iroquois nations, it was the Mohawks who were the most widely feared. Their name, Mohawks, is itself an Algonquin term meaning “eaters of men.” (The Mohawks preferred to call themselves the Kanienkehaka — the People of the Flint.) European settlers and neighbouring Indian tribes were equally afraid of the Mohawks. One historian described the reaction in New England: “As soon as a single Mohawk was discovered in their country, their Indians raised a cry from hill to hill, a Mohawk! a Mohawk! upon which they fled like sheep before wolves, without attempting to make the least resistance.”

It appears likely that the Mohawks cultivated this fierce reputation
because of its usefulness as a psychological weapon. With a small population and a large territory to protect, they needed psychological tactics to keep the enemy at bay. Even today, the Mohawks tell stories of how their ancestors would torture an enemy soldier while a second soldier watched. Then they would free the second soldier and send him scurrying back to frighten the enemy with tales of Mohawk cruelty. Three hundred years later, after the Warrior Society was created in Kahnawake, the Mohawks still used psychological tactics — including an exaggerated reputation — to intimidate their enemies.

At the peak of their power, the Iroquois — and particularly the Mohawks — were experts in guerrilla warfare and tree-to-tree fighting. If attacked by a stronger enemy, they simply withdrew from their communities and melted away into the depths of the forests. When engaged in large battles, they used a tactical line to co-ordinate their fire and their movements. First the archers and gunners fired their weapons, then the second line rushed forward, armed with clubs and tomahawks.

According to one scholar, John Price of York University, there were four basic reasons for the military success of the Iroquois in the seventeenth century: their greater use of firearms; their “strong determination and persistence in warfare” because of their desire to dominate the fur trade; their development of the new military tactic of “mass attacks on distant villages at any time of the year”; and the psychological effects of their devastating victories over the Hurons in the 1640s. The defeat of the Hurons created “a domino effect of falling societies, with greater strength on the part of the Iroquois and panic on the part of the other tribes of the region,” Price wrote. It was another example of how the Iroquois had learned to exploit the panic of their enemies. “The Iroquois developed and used what military tacticians consider to be the basic principles of modern warfare,” Price concluded.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Iroquois were the dominant Indians in the vast territory east of the Mississippi River. Virtually all of their Indian enemies were defeated and absorbed into their own ranks. They reigned supreme over a huge empire — from the Great Lakes to Tennessee, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi, from the Ohio Valley to Quebec. They enjoyed a strategic location at the centre of the fur trade, commanding the rivers northward and westward.

Their influence continued to grow. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois gradually improved their weapons technology and built up their military manpower. With a huge population now under their control and easy access to firearms and ammunition at the Dutch trading post at Albany, the Iroquois armies grew larger and larger until finally they could put as many as two thousand warriors in the field. They controlled the balance of power in the colonial rivalry between the English and French and played a key role in determining the political fate of North America.

By the 1650s, the Iroquois were turning their attention toward the French for the first time in almost half a century, in an attempt to gain control of the trading routes that led to the French settlements. They wanted the French to promise to remain neutral, as the Dutch had, so that the Mohawks could raid and hunt in the entire territory without any French interference. They began by conducting guerrilla warfare against the French in the St. Lawrence Valley, killing French settlers and taking prisoners as far east as Quebec City. The Mohawks launched a surprise attack on Trois-Rivières in 1653, and after failing to capture the village, laid siege to it. They hoped to force the French to withdraw to Quebec City, leaving the Mohawks in control of the western half of the St. Lawrence Valley.

Because of the growing strength of the Confederacy and the comparative weakness of the French, the Iroquois were able to dictate the terms of a peace agreement with the French in 1653. This allowed the Mohawks to raid the Algonquins and Montagnais without any danger of French intervention. For several years, this uneasy truce held, but in the late 1650s the Mohawks started skirmishing with the French again. By then, after the defeat of virtually every other Indian nation, the French were the only enemy the Iroquois still faced.

In 1660, the Iroquois mobilized a large force of warriors and advanced toward Montreal Island. Along the way, they encountered a group of French soldiers led by Adam Dollard Des Ormeaux, who took shelter at an abandoned Indian fort near the Long Sault Rapids of the Ottawa River. In a bloody battle, most of the French soldiers were killed and the remaining handful were taken prisoner.

A few years later, the French were ready for a counterattack. In the
winter of 1665-66, they sent an expedition against the Mohawks, but they were ambushed and forced to retreat. Another expedition of French soldiers was dispatched to attack the Mohawks in the fall of 1666. This time they succeeded in burning five Mohawk villages and the Mohawks were forced to flee. Finally they agreed to a peace treaty with the French in 1667, the terms of which were much less favourable than the terms of the treaty of 1653.

Despite this military defeat, the Iroquois continued to act as middlemen in the fur trade between Albany and the western Indians, forming military alliances with the British in the 1670s and 1680s. But in 1687 another French expedition conducted a raid into Iroquois territory and destroyed a Seneca village. In retaliation, about 1,500 Iroquois warriors attacked the Lachine settlement near Montreal, destroying the village and slaughtering its inhabitants. The incident became widely known as the Lachine massacre, and it has become a staple of history courses in Quebec schools.

The massacre was followed by a series of attacks and counterattacks by both sides. Throughout the 1690s, the Iroquois raided and pillaged French communities along the St. Lawrence and Richelieu rivers, preventing any furs from reaching the French trading posts in Montreal and Quebec for several years. But in 1693, French soldiers destroyed several Mohawk communities, capturing three hundred Mohawks. Three years later, the Iroquois suffered a massive attack by 2,200 French soldiers who destroyed several Oneida and Onondaga villages. Finally, in 1701, the Iroquois reached another peace agreement with the French.

Throughout the intercolonial wars of the eighteenth century, most of the Iroquois nations stayed neutral. In the 1750s, when the British and French were struggling for control of the northern half of the continent, both of the European powers sought the assistance of the Iroquois Confederacy, knowing that the Iroquois warriors would be a formidable force if they entered the war. At first, the Iroquois remained neutral. But in the final stages of the conflict, they decided to join the British side. It was the final blow for the French, and it was a crucial factor in determining the fate of what is now Canada.

During the American Revolution, the Mohawks supported the British. They were led by Joseph Brant, an influential Mohawk war chief who became a colonel in the British army and persuaded most of the Iroquois nations to support the British forces. When the British gave up their campaign against the American rebels in 1783, however, Brant's loyalty brought no reward: the peace negotiations failed to make any provisions to protect the Iroquois territories in the new United States.

Faced with the devastating loss of traditional Iroquois territory, Joseph Brant negotiated an agreement with Britain to give the Iroquois a vast parcel of land along the Grand River in what is now southwestern Ontario. Eventually the 570,000 acres were occupied by people from each of the six Iroquois nations, and it became known as the Six Nations reserve. (The size of the reserve was later drastically reduced by Brant's policy of selling land to white settlers.)

Brant tried to persuade the remaining Iroquois in upper New York State to migrate to the Six Nations reserve, but his efforts failed, and a split developed between the New York chiefs and the Grand River chiefs. Abandoning their policy of co-operation, the two Iroquois groups became rivals and created two parallel Confederacy structures, each with its own set of condoled chiefs. One of the Confederacies was centred at Onondaga in New York State and the second was centred at the Six Nations reserve at Grand River. The division still exists today.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Mohawks had moved northward to the new community of Kahnawake (then known as Caughnawaga), which had been established by Jesuit missionaries near Montreal in the late seventeenth century. After several relocations, the Kahnawake settlement came to its present location in 1716. Because of their strategic location, the Mohawks acted as middlemen in a contraband fur trade between Albany and Montreal. It was a lucrative business, and it helped the Kahnawake Mohawks avoid the economic decline of the Iroquois to the south.

Military organization was still an important tradition for the Mohawks of Kahnawake in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite the influence of the Jesuit missionaries, the people of Kahnawake retained their warriors and their war chiefs, and they continued to be allied with the Iroquois Confederacy. In 1716 there were an estimated two hundred warriors at Kahnawake. The same number of warriors, along with one thousand guns, were reported to
exist at Kahnawake in 1751. The French were forced to build a stone fort near the community to protect themselves from the warriors.

The Mohawks of Kahnawake refused to become officially aligned with the British or the French during most of the wars of the eighteenth century. They maintained their independence, dealing with both sides in the conflict, and ultimately helping to tip the balance toward the British. In 1760, a group of warriors from Kahnawake helped pilot the boats of a British army through the Lachine Rapids as the soldiers advanced on Montreal. But after the British captured Montreal, the Mohawks resumed their policy of independence. Because of their military influence and their strategic location, the British respected their autonomy.

During the War of 1812, the British tried to persuade the Kahnawake Mohawks to join the battle against the Americans. However, the Mohawks continued to assert their sovereignty and refused to accept British command over their warriors. Instead they remained neutral until American troops invaded Mohawk territory in their advances on Montreal. Then the Mohawks mobilized their warriors and fought the Americans at the battles of Châteauguay and Beaver Dam. There were an estimated 350 Mohawk warriors at the Battle of Châteauguay and a further 400 warriors at Beaver Dam, and they were largely responsible for the victories over the Americans in both battles. According to a British lieutenant at the Battle of Beaver Dam, the Mohawk warriors “beat the American detachment into a state of terror.”

By the late nineteenth century, the Iroquois territory had diminished and their power was waning. The Canadian government was now ready to assert its dominance over the entire Indian population, including the Iroquois. The federal Indian Act, which came into effect in 1876, was the primary instrument of the government’s attack on Indian sovereignty. The Act created a system of elections, alien to the Iroquois tradition, and imposed this system onto the Iroquois nations. It was designed to strip away the power of the Longhouse chiefs and the clan mothers and to destroy the matrilineal structure of Iroquois society. Under the new system of elections, Iroquois women would not even be allowed to vote.

If the Iroquois had accepted the elected system, they would have submitted to the authority of the Canadian government and abandoned the principle of Iroquois sovereignty — a principle they had fought to defend for centuries. So the Iroquois staunchly resisted every attempt by the Canadian government to impose this foreign system on their nations. When federal bureaucrats organized a meeting in Sarnia in 1871 to discuss the elective system, the Iroquois refused to attend, but the federal government went ahead with its plan, and elections were held at several Iroquois communities, including the Mohawk community of Tyendinaga at the Bay of Quinte in eastern Ontario. Most of the Iroquois boycotted the elections.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the elective system was strongly resisted by the Warriors Party, a group of traditionalists at Grand River led by Seth Newhouse, an Onondaga writer and scholar who sought to codify the Great Law of Peace in written form. In 1890, the Longhouse chiefs of Grand River sent a formal petition to the Governor General of Canada, complaining that the Indian Act was a violation of ancient treaties between the Iroquois and Britain. Similar petitions were sent to Ottawa by the Mohawks of Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Tyendinaga and Akwesasne. All of them rejected the Indian Act. The Mohawks of Tyendinaga, for example, had held a meeting in 1887 and overwhelmingly endorsed the traditional Longhouse system of government. “We therefore do not want our Council Fire extinguished, because it was the custom and manner of our forefathers,” they told the federal government.

In their petitions, the Mohawks reminded the Canadian government that the British Crown had signed treaties with the Iroquois, recognizing the sovereignty of the Iroquois people. “What is your power and authority to rule our people?” one petition asked. Another petition, signed by more than one thousand Mohawks, said: “The Indian Act breeds only sorrow, contention, hatred, disrespect of family ties, spite against one another, and absence of unity among us Indians. It also creates two distinct parties at the elections. The law was never authorized in its adaptation among Indians.”

All the petitions were flatly rejected by the federal government, and a law was approved in 1890 which authorized the Indian Affairs Department to impose the elected system without the consent of the
Indians. But the Mohawks continued to assert their sovereignty. The conflict soon turned into a violent struggle between Canadian police and Mohawk warriors.

In 1898, when the federal government tried to organize an election on the Canadian side of the Akwesasne reserve, the Mohawks refused to permit it. "We have considered the elective system as not being intended by us Indians, and we would therefore return to our old methods of selecting our life chiefs, according to our Constitution Iroquois Government," the Akwesasne clan mothers wrote in a petition to Ottawa. Then they went ahead and appointed a new council of Longhouse chiefs and advised Ottawa of the names of the chiefs.

The Department of Indian Affairs was enraged by the rebelliousness of the Mohawks. "The Department is determined not to allow any of the Indians to set its authority at defiance," a senior official wrote to the federal Indian agent at Akwesasne. "They might as well look for the falling of the sky as to expect recognition of their claim to hold the position of a practically independent state," another official wrote.

The department sent police officers to Akwesasne in 1898 and 1899 to force the community to hold an election, but twice the Mohawks forcibly prevented the election from being held. In the spring of 1899, another election was scheduled. Two police officers accompanied the Indian agent, George Long, to a school house where the election was to occur. "They found it surrounded by about 200 aborigines," the Montreal Star reported. "They were refused admittance and a general riot took place. The police were badly assaulted and Indian Agent Long was seized and locked up in the school house. A guard was placed over him, and the Dominion Police were driven away. At six o'clock at night, Mr. Long was still caged up."

One of the police officers said Ottawa might be forced to call out the 43rd Battalion of the Canadian army to force the Mohawks to hold an election. The newspaper said the Mohawks had "fought like demons" with "visions of the warpath before them." If the police officers had tried to use their weapons against the Mohawks, it said, "they would have been scalped by the frenzied mob."

A few weeks later, on May 1, 1899, the police set a trap for the Mohawks. Pretending to be representatives of a construction company, they sent a message to the Longhouse chiefs, asking for a meeting at the Indian agent's office to discuss the possible purchase of some stone for a bridge. When the chiefs arrived at the agent's office, they were seized and handcuffed by the police. One of the chiefs was hurled to the floor. His brother, variously identified as Jake Ice or Jake Fire, rushed to the agent's office when he heard the news. He burst through the door and tried to free the chief, but he was intercepted by a police officer. There was a struggle, and the Mohawk was shot and killed.

Over the following weeks, fifteen Mohawks were arrested and jailed, including five chiefs who were imprisoned for almost a year. After a trial in the spring of 1900, they were given a strong warning and released. Finally, after all this intimidation, a small group of Mohawks was persuaded to hold an election. The vote was held in Cornwall to avoid the wrath of the people of Akwesasne. In its report on the election, the government admitted that there was "only a small attendance." The Akwesasne Mohawks say the voters were plied with alcohol to ensure their cooperation.

Meanwhile, the Iroquois of the Six Nations reserve were embroiled in their own struggle to resist the elective system. Because of their large population, they were somewhat more successful, and as late as the 1920s they still refused to allow any elections on the reserve. The Six Nations Iroquois were led by Levi General, a fiery orator known as Deskeheh. During the controversy over conscription in World War I, he had led an Iroquois delegation to Ottawa to explain that the federal government had no authority to impose the draft on the Iroquois.

After the war, Deskeheh and the Six Nations Iroquois hired a lawyer to research a court case to confirm their sovereign status. They were alarmed when they saw the signs of increasing federal encroachment on their sovereignty. In 1921, Deskeheh travelled to London, England, to present a petition to the British Colonial Office. He gained a lot of publicity from Fleet Street newspapers, but the British government refused to intervene in the dispute.

The Longhouse chiefs of the Six Nations reserve insisted that they were a sovereign people, not subject to the laws of Canada, and they urged their people to resist any police officers who entered the reserve. When several constables raided the reserve in 1922 to search for liquor manufacturers, a group of armed Indians forced them to leave.
Shots were fired, although it is not clear who fired them. In response, the federal government sent in the RCMP and ordered them to set up a permanent detachment on the reserve. The RCMP jailed a number of Mohawks and raided the home of Deskeheh, who had hastily fled to the United States. This show of brute force temporarily quelled the rebellion, but the Iroquois regarded themselves as an occupied nation, and they described the RCMP as the “armed forces” of a foreign power.

In 1923, Deskeheh went back to Europe to campaign for international recognition of Iroquois sovereignty. A group of Mohawk chiefs and warriors had raised thousands of dollars to fund his campaign, which took him to London and Geneva. He lobbied diplomats at the League of Nations in Geneva and persuaded a Dutch diplomat to present an Iroquois petition to the League’s secretary-general.

Meanwhile, Ottawa had appointed Andrew Thompson, a lawyer and former military officer, to investigate whether the Six Nations reserve should have an elective system. The Longhouse chiefs refused to testify at the inquiry because they did not recognize Ottawa’s jurisdiction. In his final report, Thompson acknowledged that the Longhouse chiefs saw themselves as sovereign people. “The separatist party, if I may so describe it, is exceptionally strong in the Council of Chiefs, in fact it is completely dominant there,” Thompson reported.

“There can be no doubt that some of the people cling to this ancient form of government,” he added. “The Six Nations Indians have a wonderful history, and they are surprisingly well acquainted with its main features. They know that their confederacy, though numerically small as compared with the total Indian population, dominated America from the Great Lakes almost to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Mississippi to the Atlantic... Today they find themselves confined to a territory the size of a township, and with a total population less than that of a small Canadian city. They feel bitterly their fallen state. Their greatness and their influence are gone. Their history alone remains to them.”

Thompson quoted one Indian who proudly described the Longhouse system as “the oldest form of government on the American continent.” But he concluded that the Longhouse government had “long outlived its usefulness” and recommended that an elective sys-

tem be inaugurated “at the earliest possible date.”

In October 1923, a new Indian superintendent was appointed at Brantford, near the Six Nations reserve. He was Colonel C.E. Morgan, a Boer War veteran and a former South African colonial administrator who frequently wore a pistol. He urged Ottawa to use the police to tighten its grip on the Iroquois.

By the spring of 1924, Deskeheh had won the support of diplomats from Persia, Estonia, Ireland and Panama, who presented the Iroquois case before the League of Nations. The British, resorting to a campaign of backroom arm-twisting and threats of serious diplomatic consequences, persuaded these countries to abandon their efforts, but the entire incident was annoying to Ottawa. And so in September of 1924, the federal government passed an order-in-council requiring the Indian Act to be fully applied to the Six Nations reserve.

A few weeks later, Colonel Morgan arrived at the Six Nations council house to enforce the order. Accompanied by twenty police officers with guns, he interrupted a meeting of the Longhouse chiefs and announced that the Longhouse government had been abolished. The police expelled the traditional chiefs, broke open their safe and seized the legal records of the Iroquois, including their wampum belts — the symbols of Iroquois government. And the police burst into homes on the reserve to remove loose wampum which might be used to make new wampum belts.

An election was finally held in October of 1924, but few of the Iroquois participated. Several months later, Deskeheh fell sick and returned to North America. In his final speech, in a radio broadcast on March 10, 1925, he remained defiant. “An enemy’s foot is on our country,” he said. “The governments of Washington and Ottawa have a silent partnership of policy. It is aimed to break up every tribe of Redmen so as to dominate every acre of their territory. Over in Ottawa, they call that policy ‘Indian Advancement.’ Over in Washington, they call it ‘Assimilation.’ We who would be the helpless victims say it is tyranny. If this must go on to the bitter end, we would rather that you come with your guns and poison gases and get rid of us that way. Do it openly and above board. Do away with the pretense that you have the right to subjugate us to your will.”

Within three months, Deskeheh had died. At his funeral, Iroquois
leaders urged their people to continue his work. The RCMP monitored the funeral and interrogated some of the participants later to get translations of the speeches.

The Six Nations Iroquois did continue to lobby for recognition of their sovereignty, and in 1928, three years after Deskeheh’s death, they hired lawyers and issued a declaration of independence. The Mohawks held secret meetings to plot a strategy for asserting their sovereignty, but the RCMP planted a spy at their meetings and monitored their tactics.

Elections were held regularly at the Six Nations reserve and other Iroquois communities in Canada, but few people ever voted. Ottawa began funding the elected councils and allowing them to control all federal grants and financial programs on the reserves, yet the elected councillors failed to gain any legitimacy. It was the Longhouse chiefs who continued to exercise authority on the reserves, since most people regarded the elected councils as puppets of the federal government. At the Akwesasne reserve, as few as 20 people voted in elections where several thousand people were eligible to cast ballots. At Six Nations, only 53 of 3,600 eligible voters participated in an election in 1957. In other elections at Six Nations, no more than a few hundred of the Iroquois have cast ballots.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Iroquois consistently asserted their sovereignty. Time and time again, they petitioned Ottawa and London to remove the elected system and restore the Longhouse system of government. They issued their own Iroquois passports, which were eventually accepted by more than twenty countries around the world. In 1926, a judge in Philadelphia declared that the Iroquois had the right to travel freely across the border between Canada and the United States because they were “a nation within a nation.” In 1930, an Iroquois delegation travelled to Britain and appeared before a parliamentary committee to argue their case for sovereignty. And in 1945, another Iroquois delegation made a submission to the United Nations. “As a nation, we appeal to the conscience of the democratic nations for action to correct the deep injustice under which we are suffering,” the Iroquois told the United Nations.

Their efforts were largely unrewarded, however, as the Canadian government still refused to recognize the authority of the Longhouse government. So the Iroquois decided to take matters into their own hands. On March 5, 1959, a group of about 1,300 Iroquois people — led by a group calling itself the Mohawk Warriors — marched to the council house at Six Nations. The elected councillors, who were holding a locked-door meeting at the time, fled out the back door while the Iroquois were removing the front door from its hinges.

After seizing the council house, the group called a community meeting. About five thousand people, including Christians as well as Longhouse followers, came to hear the speeches. One of the most powerful speeches was given by Mad Bear, a famous Tuscarora leader who travelled frequently to Iroquois reserves across the continent. After the meeting, the Iroquois drafted a proclamation and nailed it to the door of the council house. It abolished the elected council, restored the Longhouse council, and appointed a 133-member Iroquois police force to replace the RCMP. The new police force began patrolling the reserve and arresting motorists for traffic infractions.

Six days later, the federal government ordered the Iroquois police to stop making arrests. “I must further inform you that steps will be taken without delay to restore and maintain peace and order on the Six Nations reserve,” Citizenship Minister Ellen Fairclough told the Iroquois in a telegram. The warning was ignored. “She can go and jump in the lake,” Mad Bear told a meeting on the reserve.

A day later, at three o’clock in the morning, sixty RCMP officers attacked the council house, where about 130 people had gathered to resist the expected raid. A riot quickly developed, led by the Iroquois women, who tried to push the police out. As television cameras recorded the scene, the police clubbed the Iroquois and dragged them out of the council house.

The events of 1959 were proof that the warrior tradition was still alive. For almost a century, the federal government had been trying to extinguish the threat of Iroquois nationalism. The government passed special laws to destroy the Longhouse system, installed puppet governments to replace the traditional chiefs, and ordered the RCMP to crush the Iroquois rebels with brutal tactics. Yet the Iroquois never surrendered their sovereignty. With the Mohawks at the vanguard of the battle, the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy stubbornly fought any attempt to restrict their independence, and they defended their territory and their political institutions with every possible tactic —
including violence when it was considered necessary. Although few Canadians were aware of it, a war of independence was being waged in the Mohawk communities of Ontario and Quebec. Over the next several decades, the mood of Mohawk militancy would continue to intensify, and a new generation of warriors would revive the military strategies and psychological tactics that their ancestors had introduced so successfully.

CHAPTER 8

The Psychology of Fear

The Rise of the Warrior Society

The scene on the bridge was chaotic. Dozens of provincial police and RCMP officers were fighting with a hundred angry Mohawks who had seized the Seaway International Bridge on Cornwall Island. The Mohawks were throwing their bodies in front of trucks that were trying to clear away the blockade. At the centre of the pandemonium was a fifteen-year-old Mohawk youth, a short kid with long blond hair. When the Mohawks seized the bridge, he had driven a station wagon into the middle of the bridge to block traffic. Now he was lying on the floor of the vehicle as the police officers tried to push it away. Every time the cops pushed the station wagon, the youth pulled on the emergency brake. Then he would release the brake as the crowd of Mohawks shoved the vehicle back toward the cops. The police kept pleading with the blond kid to get out of the car, but he refused to leave. The Mohawks tried to convince the police that the teenager was deaf. It didn’t work. The blond kid was arrested and hauled away.

It was December 18, 1968, and the history of Mohawk militancy had shifted to a new level of intensity. From now on, the Mohawks would not wait for the authorities to attack their communities. They had decided to go on the offensive, to assert their sovereignty by setting up barricades and repossessing their traditional land. The takeover of the Seaway International Bridge, which crossed the Akwesasne reserve as
prominent in the warrior movement at Kahnawake. Two of his sons became war chiefs at the Kahnawake Longhouse, and many of his other descendants became warriors. If anyone can be called the father of the Warrior Society, it is Eddie Delaronde. He is still alive today, a ninety-year-old man who lives quietly at the repossessed Mohawk territory of Ganienkeh in upper New York State.

As a child, Paul Delaronde was surrounded by Longhouse old-timers. He listened to their stories and peppered them with questions. When he was sent to bed, he would sit at the top of the stairs so he could keep listening to the conversation of the elders.

For a while, Paul was worried that his skin and hair were too light-coloured. Was he perhaps a white person? But the elders assured him that he was definitely a Mohawk.

The Delaronde family got its first exposure to radical action in 1957 when they joined an unsuccessful attempt to repossess a parcel of traditional Mohawk land in New York State. The move was led by Standing Arrow, a charismatic Mohawk chief from Akwesasne, who established an encampment of two hundred followers on private farmland in the Mohawk Valley near the town of Amsterdam. Many of his followers were ironworkers from Kahnawake who had been constructing a new bridge on a nearby state expressway when they learned of the move. Others were Mohawks who complained that they were “blasted from their homes” when the St. Lawrence Seaway was pushed through Kahnawake and Akwesasne. For almost a year, the Mohawks lived in poverty in an abandoned school bus and a handful of shacks on the land they were trying to repossess.

Standing Arrow had obtained a copy of a 1784 treaty which appeared to confirm that the land was Mohawk territory, and he showed the treaty to anyone who challenged the encampment. But eventually his followers drifted away and the farmers obtained an eviction order. The move to the Mohawk Valley, which had begun in a mood of optimism, ended in complete failure.

Standing Arrow returned to Akwesasne, but he was a beaten man. He was criticized and disowned by some Longhouse leaders, who were not yet ready to accept militant tactics. Soon he disappeared from the political scene.

When the Delarondes drove back from the Mohawk Valley, they
refused to pay a toll on a state expressway, citing their rights under old Iroquois treaties. Their argument was rejected, and two of Paul’s uncles were arrested. For the next decade, the people of Kahnawake and Akwesasne subsided into silence.

By the late 1960s, however, a revival of Indian militancy was sweeping across North America, and the Mohawks were at the forefront of the movement. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minnesota in 1968, and it began to gain influence among urban Indians across the continent. Other events soon followed — including the seizure of the Seaway International Bridge by the Mohawks. Then, in 1969, a group of Indians jumped off a boat in San Francisco’s harbour and swam out to Alcatraz Island, the site of the famous penitentiary which was now abandoned. They announced that they were “reclaiming” the island “by right of discovery” — in a deliberate imitation of the early European explorers.

Eventually about eighty Indians occupied Alcatraz Island. Their leader was Richard Oakes, a Mohawk from Akwesasne who had travelled to California after eleven years as an ironworker.

The takeover of Alcatraz generated huge publicity in the United States, where it was seen as the first major event in the new era of “Red Power.” The Indians, who succeeded in gaining a resolution of support from the U.S. Congress, occupied the island for nineteen months. Then in 1970, the White House ordered the Coast Guard to cut off electricity and water supplies to the island. After a long stalemate, the few remaining Indians were arrested and removed from the island in June 1971.

Richard Oakes was shot and killed in an unrelated incident in 1972. His legacy, however, is still alive today. One of his cousins, Harold Oakes of Akwesasne, was a leader of the Mohawk warriors who defended the barricades at Oka in the summer of 1990. Harold Oakes, who went by the codename Beekeeper, was one of the most senior of the Mohawk warriors who remained at Oka to the bitter end.

The political and cultural revival of the Mohawks that began to build momentum in Kahnawake in the late 1960s was fuelled by a new generation of young Mohawks, including Paul Delaronde. They had seen Mohawk dances in their childhood, especially during the takeover at Mohawk Valley, and now they wanted to learn the traditional songs of their culture. One of Paul’s uncles borrowed some tape recordings from an elder at the Onondaga reservation in New York State, and after raising enough money to buy a tape recorder, the Mohawks began to study the songs. In 1968 they formed a Mohawk Singing Society, with Paul Delaronde and one of his brothers as the lead singers. It was the first organized group among the young militants, who were determined to rebuild the fighting spirit of the Mohawk nation and bring back its former glory. Over the next few years, the Singing Society evolved into the warrior movement at Kahnawake, and many of the traditional singers became the founders of the Mohawk Warrior Society.

There were seven young Mohawk men, including Paul Delaronde, who emerged as the strongest activists in the cultural and political revival at Kahnawake. By the late 1960s, they were already calling themselves the warriors. Soon they decided to describe themselves as the Warrior Society. Although the term “warrior society” had never been used before in Iroquois history, there was a long tradition of warriors in all the Iroquois nations. There was also a long history of Iroquois secret societies, including medicine societies and false face (mask) societies, which kept their cultural traditions alive in ceremonies and rituals. The Warrior Society combined these two traditions.

Some of the young men preferred to call themselves the rotiskenerahekeheh. Usually translated as “warriors,” the literal meaning of the Mohawk word is “the men who carry the burden of peace.” This phrase captures the original sense of the warriors’ role, as embodied in the Great Law of Peace. According to the Great Law, all able-bodied men had a responsibility to help defend their people.

Others argued that the complex Mohawk word was meaningless to outsiders. They wanted a simple name, easily understood in English, and they wanted to gain a psychological edge on their opponents. By calling themselves the Warrior Society, they could create a frightening image for their organization. The warriors needed every psychological advantage they could find. Their organization had a small membership, and they did not want outsiders to realize how weak they might really be. “We capitalized on their fear,” Paul Delaronde says.

Weapons were not a significant part of the warrior movement in the early days. However, virtually every Mohawk family in Kahnawake
owned a shotgun or a hunting rifle, and the warriors were no different. Sometimes they carried those guns in their cars and trucks when they travelled to confrontations or blockades in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The earliest incidents were relatively peaceful. In 1970, the young warriors from Kahnawake helped a group of activists from Akwesasne who had reclaimed two islands of traditional Mohawk territory in the St. Lawrence River. The Canadian government had given the islands to wealthy cottagers on long-term leases for as little as six dollars a year. Inspired by the Alcatraz takeover in California, the Mohawks seized Stanley Island and Loon Island in the spring of 1970.

Paul Delaronde was one of sixteen young Mohawks who helped occupy Stanley Island. “We played mind games with the cottagers,” he recalls. “We built huge bonfires and yelled and scared the hell out of them.”

Three weeks later, more than a hundred Mohawks climbed into a barge and invaded Loon Island. “Some were punching the air with clenched fists and as the barge approached the shore, all burst into a Mohawk battle song,” one newspaper reported. “Minutes later the barge tied up at the island’s community dock and the Indians swarmed ashore, carrying tents, cooking pots, and two signs that said they were reclaiming the island for the Mohawk nation.”

The Akwesasne island takeovers were led by Mike Mitchell, a young activist who later became the elected chief of the Canadian side of the reserve. Mitchell was not a warrior, but many of those who occupied the islands (such as Paul Delaronde) were members of the Warrior Society, and the success of the Akwesasne takeovers helped build their reputation.

As their reputation grew, the Kahnawake warriors received pleas for help from other Iroquois reserves. In the summer of 1971 it was the Onondagas of New York State who made an urgent late-night telephone call to Kahnawake. New York State authorities were trying to expand Highway 81, an interstate route that passed through the middle of the Onondaga reservation, south of Syracuse. Longhouse activists had blocked the construction workers, refusing to surrender an inch of Iroquois land. “The United States ends here,” Chief Leon Shenandoah told the state authorities.

The state had tried to resume construction, however, and it was then that the Onondagas called for help from the Kahnawake warriors. Paul Delaronde, Eddie Delaronde and Richard Oakes were part of the contingent that rushed down to join the battle. They drove all night, arriving at Onondaga in time for a Longhouse ceremony at dawn. Before long, the state troopers arrived to serve a court injunction against the protesters, and there was a tense confrontation between the troopers and the two hundred Indians who had come to oppose the construction. Many of the Mohawk warriors had guns in their cars, but they kept the weapons out of sight. When the troopers finally left, the warriors helped to occupy the construction site for several weeks until an agreement was reached.

As the warriors continued to gain strength, some of the older and more moderate chiefs at Kahnawake began to resent the challenge from these young militants. Paul Delaronde and most of his supporters were still just teenagers. “We were outspoken and we weren’t diplomatic,” Delaronde recalls. In 1972, when one of the older chiefs complained about their conduct, the warriors went to the Kahnawake Longhouse to get an official stamp of approval for their organization — which they received after a brief discussion among the chiefs of the three Mohawk clans.

At the time of its sanctioning as an official society of the Longhouse, the Warrior Society had about thirty members at Kahnawake. Most were teenagers and young adults from the Longhouse, which itself was enjoying a rapid growth in popularity. After decades as an underground organization, holding secret meetings to avoid police raids, the Longhouse was now openly supported by a large percentage of the community. And it was bitterly feuding with the Kahnawake band council, the elected body which was legally recognized by the federal government as the sole legitimate government on the reserve. Unlike the Longhouse, the band council accepted the authority of the Indian Act. The warriors and the Longhouse rejected the Indian Act and defied its rules wherever possible.

In 1973, a year after they became a sanctioned society, the warriors at Kahnawake engaged in their first pitched battle with the Quebec police. The conflict, which began as an eviction campaign and turned into an armed siege at the Kahnawake Longhouse, brought the Warrior Society to the attention of the mainstream media for the first time.
It all began when the warriors discovered that a white family had obtained a quarter-acre of land on the Kahnawake reserve and had begun to build a home on the site. The family said they had legal permission to own the land, but the legality of white ownership had never been fully clarified in the courts, and many Mohawks were angered by the presence of non-native residents on the reserve. There was already a severe shortage of housing at Kahnawake and many of the younger Mohawks were unable to find a home on the reserve. So in early September 1973, the warriors sent eviction notices to hundreds of non-native “trespassers” who were living on the reserve. The warriors, backed by the Longhouse, told the non-natives to leave their homes within two weeks. “If you fail to comply with this request, physical action will be taken by the Warrior Society,” the notices said.

Soon the warriors were travelling from house to house, urging the non-natives to leave. Paul Delaronde, accompanied by another Mohawk militant named Art Montour, rode on horseback at the head of the warriors. Six members of the American Indian Movement, who had participated in the famous siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, just a few months earlier, joined the small band of warriors in the eviction campaign, and hundreds of ordinary Mohawks helped the warriors.

Ron Kirby, the chief (or mayor) of the elected council, said the warriors were moving too fast. The council set its own deadline, October 15, for the eviction of the non-natives, emphasizing that its own evictions would follow the rules of the Indian Act. When the warriors continued with their forcible evictions, Kirby went to court to charge six of the warriors (including Paul Delaronde) with intimidation, threatening, and mischief, among other charges. The warriors pleaded not guilty, arguing that the Quebec courts have no authority over Mohawk territory.

By the middle of October, almost all of the non-natives had agreed to leave the reserve. Some acknowledged that they shouldn’t have been on the reserve in the first place; others were afraid of the warriors. But one white resident still refused to go. On the afternoon of October 15, a dozen warriors arrived at his doorstep and forced him to leave. The warriors, including Paul Delaronde and several of his relatives, took over the house and occupied it.

Before long, the SQ were on the scene. Quebec has always insisted that Kahnawake is within the jurisdiction of the provincial police, and police officers had been patrolling the reserve for weeks because of the increasing tensions. When they arrived at the house, they smashed windows and threatened to fire tear gas canisters into the building. In the end, the warriors agreed to leave — but they fought with the police officers who tried to arrest them for break-and-enter. One of the warriors set the house on fire as he left. Paul Delaronde, who suffered three broken ribs in the brawl with the police, was among a group of warriors who were arrested and taken to a police station on the reserve.

The police station was immediately surrounded by hundreds of enraged Mohawks who believed the Quebec police had no right to arrest people on Mohawk territory. They demanded that the warriors be released within an hour. When the deadline passed with no warriors released, a riot erupted. The Mohawks injured three police officers and overturned three police cars. “Their roofs [were] crushed like cardboard, window glass spilled on the street like crushed ice and gasoline poured from their tanks,” a Montreal newspaper reported. The police tried to use tear gas to disperse the mob, but the wind blew the gas in the wrong direction and the police fled. The Mohawks climbed on top of the overturned vehicles and delivered angry speeches denouncing Kirby and the police. Eventually a police riot squad, equipped with helmets and riot sticks, arrived in Kahnawake to clear the crowd.

Dozens of warriors retreated to the Longhouse, where they armed themselves with hunting rifles and dug foxholes and military-style bunkers for protection. Kahnawake itself was transformed into an armed camp, with about 150 SQ officers patrolling the reserve, stopping Mohawk motorists and searching their vehicles. The armed standoff, which continued for a week, had a radicalizing effect on the people of Kahnawake. Embittered by the massive police presence in their community, many of the Mohawks — including some Catholics and Protestants — became Longhouse supporters for the first time in their lives. Some picked up guns to help defend the community.

After a week of fear and tension, the Quebec police agreed to withdraw — but on one condition. Convinced that the six members of AIM were the ringleaders in the riot, they said they would withdraw from Kahnawake as long as the AIM activists would agree to leave the re-
serve. An agreement was struck and the siege ended on October 23. But it was not the AIM members who were the source of all the trouble at Kahnawake. It was the Mohawks themselves. Their militancy could not be suppressed by police intervention because it sprang from their fervent belief in Mohawk sovereignty and their willingness to fight for that belief.

During the siege at the Longhouse, the warriors had plenty of time to sit inside the building and discuss their future. They realized that their bunkers and foxholes were defending a tiny site — barely a hectare of land on the fringes of the Longhouse. Yet the traditional Mohawk territory, now contained within the borders of Vermont and New York State, amounted to 3.6 million hectares. "Why don't we take back some of our land?" one of the warriors asked.

After lengthy discussion in the weeks that followed the siege, the Longhouse approved a secret plan to repossess a parcel of land in the traditional Mohawk territory. During the winter of 1973-74, the warriors planned their strategy. Four warriors — including Paul Delaronde and Art Montour — were dispatched to Vermont and New York State to scout for the perfect site. Recalling the confrontations with farmers who owned the site of the Mohawk Valley encampment in 1957, the warriors decided that this time they should find land owned by the state. Their battle, after all, was aimed at government policies. It was not a fight with private landowners.

In the end, the scouts chose a mountainous 248-hectare site in the Adirondacks of upper New York State. The area, known as Moss Lake, was an abandoned girls' camp that had recently been purchased by the state. It had no telephones and no electricity — but it had other advantages if the police tried to dislodge the warriors. "Moss Lake was an excellent place for a war," one Mohawk recalls. "It was very hilly, and there was lots of tree cover." Another described it as a "mountain stronghold" for the warriors. "There were huge trees," he said. "It was like a jungle." For the first time, military considerations were entering the warrior strategy.

Although the warriors were convinced that they had found the best site, they held a tobacco-burning ceremony at Moss Lake to seek confirmation of their choice from the Creator. Soon they spotted a hawk, an eagle and a deer — animals with a special significance in the Mohawk tradition. These were the signs they were waiting for.

To ensure the success of the takeover, the warriors maintained absolute secrecy about the location of the site. As a diversion tactic, they started a rumour that they would be occupying a site in Vermont. Then, in the spring of 1974, they began shipping food and supplies to Akwesasne, where they prepared for the final move.

Late on the night of May 13, 1974, about forty carloads of Mohawks drove from Kahnawake to Akwesasne, accompanied by a school bus carrying their children. Police officers were waiting at the Vermont border — but the Mohawks never showed up. Instead, leaving Akwesasne quietly in the middle of the night, they drove to Moss Lake. It was still dark when they arrived and took over the camp.

About eighty people, including women and children, were in the first contingent of Mohawks who settled at Moss Lake. They issued a manifesto, declaring that they were repossessing a small part of their ancient homeland and that they would "live off the land" in a cooperative farming economy. The manifesto said the Mohawks had a right to control their territory "with no interference from any foreign nation or government." The territory would be called Ganienkeh — "Land of the Flint" — the traditional name for the Mohawk homeland.

On the first day of the occupation, a pair of forest rangers arrived at the gate. But when they tried to enter, they were met by thirty warriors with shotguns and high-powered rifles. They quickly retreated. All of the Mohawk men had guns. "You had to carry a gun everywhere," one recalled. "You even had to sleep with your gun."

State authorities postponed any official action against the Mohawks, but the local residents soon became resentful of the new community. On several occasions, motorists drove past and fired shots into the Mohawk encampment. Finally, on October 28, 1974, the Mohawks returned the gunfire and two whites were injured, including a nine-year-old girl.

The police insisted on entering Moss Lake to investigate the shootings, but the Mohawks refused to give permission, and an armed standoff began. One police officer warned the Mohawks to remove their women and children from the site within two hours because the police were about to attack. The women held a meeting and unanimously decided to stay in the encampment.

Hundreds of Indians — including veterans of the 1973 Wounded
Knee siege — rushed to Moss Lake to help defend the community. Carrying guns, they crept through the woods to get past the roadblocks the police had set up. They dug bunkers, planted “booby traps” of boards with nails in them, and prepared for the expected assault by the state troopers.

The police, however, had recently gone through a bloody assault on rioting convicts at Attica Penitentiary and were not anxious for another battle — especially against a well-organized group of armed warriors. One police commander said it would have been “a bloodbath to end all bloodbaths” and it would have “made Attica look like a Sunday school picnic.” The Mohawks confirmed that they were prepared to repel any police invasion. “It would have been just like a shooting gallery,” one Mohawk said later.

Five weeks later, a district attorney obtained a search warrant to authorize police entry into the encampment. But when the police warned it would take three hundred troopers to enforce the search warrant, he announced that he would not try to carry it out. No arrests were ever made in connection with the shootings.

Shortly before the October shootings, a softspoken Shawnee Indian from Oklahoma had arrived at Moss Lake. He had been given a Mohawk name, Tronkekwe, but everyone knew him by his nickname — Cartoon. An AIM member and a veteran of the Vietnam war, Cartoon had helped the Kahnawake warriors in 1973 in the siege at the Longhouse, giving them advice on the construction of military bunkers. Now he was ready to provide the same tactical advice at Moss Lake.

The warriors asked Cartoon to organize a security force to protect the Moss Lake encampment. He taught the warriors how to conduct a military patrol, how to dig foxholes, how to strip a gun in the dark and put it back together. And he taught the warriors how to kill.

“They weren’t accustomed to taking someone’s life,” he recalled in an interview. “I trained them to take a man out, any way you can. I made soldiers out of them. I taught them to be commandos. Any military unit would have been proud to have these guys. They knew that if there was a shooting war, they might not come back alive. But they were willing to pay the price.”

A few of the Mohawks had served in the U.S. military, but none of them had Cartoon’s combat experience. The Mohawks acknowledge that Cartoon played a crucial role in training the warriors. One of them described Cartoon as the unofficial war chief of Moss Lake.

“How does it feel to kill someone?” the warriors would ask Cartoon.

“It all depends on the man who does the killing,” he always replied with a quiet smile.

He used the standard psychological tactics of a marine sergeant to train the warriors, terrifying them with warnings of what he would do to any warrior who ran away from a gunfight. “I’ll be right behind you,” he told them. “I’ll see the first man run and I’ll shoot him myself. That’s not a promise, that’s a guarantee.”

Even the Mohawk children were given military training. Mark “Blackjack” Montour became a warrior at the age of thirteen when he was given a gun to help defend the Moss Lake encampment. “They tell you three things when they give you a gun,” he recalls. “You’ve got to keep it clean, you protect your people and your territory, and you only return fire and never initiate it.”

In the mid-1970s, the warriors were still using shotguns and hunting rifles. They had not yet acquired any semi-automatic weapons. One day, they asked Cartoon what kind of gun he recommended. He said he preferred the AK-47. “You can put it in dirt, snow, mud, give it a good shake, and it still operates,” he said. “I’ve seen one with bullet holes in it and it still operated.” Within a few years, when the warriors acquired their first semi-automatic weapons, they followed Cartoon’s advice and chose the AK-47.

Although the warriors were outnumbered by the state troopers, they used the mountainous terrain to their advantage. “We were in an ideal position, geographically,” Cartoon remembers. “We only had a small number of men, but a lot of them were born and raised in the woods. The troopers didn’t know how many we were. A good military man will make the enemy think you have something you don’t.”

For months, the non-native residents near Moss Lake had been trying to evict the Mohawks with legal action, but they failed to convince the courts to order the Mohawks removed. Eventually the Mohawks entered into negotiations with New York officials, and in 1977 an agreement was reached. The Mohawks agreed to abandon Moss Lake in exchange for two parcels of land in Clinton County, near the town of Altona, just south of the Canadian border.

The new site, which soon came to be known as Ganienkeh now that
the old Ganienkeh was abandoned, was not as defensible as Moss Lake because it was not in a mountainous region. But it had one distinct advantage: it was much closer to Kahnawake and Akwesasne. Now reinforcements could reach the community within an hour if a crisis arose.

The land at Moss Lake had been too rocky to allow much farming. The land at Ganienkeh was much better, but life in the new encampment was still harsh. There was no electricity and there were few modern conveniences. The Mohawks built their own log houses and kept a few cattle and chickens. Economic self-sufficiency proved difficult to achieve, and some of the Mohawk men were forced to hold jobs as ironworkers to get enough income for their families.

As much as possible, the Mohawks of Ganienkeh followed the rules of the Great Law of Peace. The Longhouse was the official government for the community, as well as the focus of its spiritual life. Alcohol and drugs were strictly prohibited and anyone violating that rule could be banished from the community. Indeed, some Mohawks came to live in Ganienkeh temporarily to break their dependency on alcohol or drugs.

The Reverend Richard Campbell, a local clergyman who developed a friendship with the Ganienkeh residents, has suggested that there are parallels between the birth of Ganienkeh and the birth of the state of Israel in 1948. "Both are examples of devout people who returned to their ancestral land for largely religious and spiritual reasons," he wrote in 1985. There are other parallels as well, it might be added. In both cases, military training and confrontations with hostile neighbours were a routine fact of life.

As the situation in Ganienkeh began to stabilize, the warrior movement was relatively quiet for several years — until an armed conflict erupted in 1979 at Akwesasne. The incident began at Raquette Point, a small chunk of Akwesasne territory on the U.S. side of the St. Lawrence River. The man at the centre of the armed standoff was Loran Thompson, a young Longhouse chief and faithkeeper who had a reputation as a spellbinding speaker in his Mohawk tongue. Thompson was a good-humoured man with a wolfish smile. He was utterly uncompromising in his belief in Mohawk sovereignty, and perhaps as a result he became one of the most controversial figures in Akwesasne: a man who inspired loyalty from his followers and hatred from his enemies.

In the spring of 1979, Thompson found a gang of workers cutting down trees near his home on Raquette Point, in preparation for the installation of a fence that the elected council on the U.S. side of Akwesasne had ordered. The Longhouse was strongly opposed to the fence project because it weakened their claim to their traditional territory outside the reserve, so Loran Thompson confronted the workers and confiscated their chainsaws. A few hours later, an Akwesasne police officer and several state troopers arrived at Thompson's home with a warrant for his arrest. Since the Longhouse does not recognize the state's jurisdiction over Mohawk territory, Thompson resisted arrest and skirmished briefly with the police until he was subdued and taken away.

The next day, Longhouse members told the Akwesasne police that their arrest of Loran Thompson was a violation of the Great Law of Peace. The Mohawk police, controlled by the elected council of Akwesasne, were acting as agents of a foreign government and they must resign and disband, the traditionalists announced. The police refused to resign. After three warnings, a crowd of several hundred Mohawks and other Longhouse supporters marched to the police station. The Mohawks rushed in and fought with the police for several minutes. They disarmed the police and took over the entire building, which included the headquarters of the elected council.

Three weeks later, Thompson was charged with larceny and resisting arrest. He ignored the charges. Then, in August, a further twenty-one Mohawks were named in sealed indictments in connection with the battle at the Akwesasne police station. This meant that they were subject to arrest at any time. Those who feared arrest began to gather at Thompson's home at Raquette Point.

Two weeks later, in a massive show of strength, the state troopers invaded Akwesasne. Assisted by a police airplane and a SWAT squad, the troopers arrested three Mohawks, but they did not dare to enter the Thompson property, where a gunfight would probably have ensued. Instead they blockaded the roads and sealed off Raquette Point.

The Mohawks, including Art Montour and Paul Delaronde and a number of other warriors from Ganienkeh, built emergency housing and dug bunkers to defend the Thompson property. A few Mohawks
began carrying AK-47s and other semi-automatic weapons for the first time. The police eventually withdrew their roadblocks, but the Mohawks remained behind the bunkers at Raquette Point because they feared arrest. Armed vigilantes, mostly Christian Mohawks who supported the elected council, threatened to invade Raquette Point to capture the wanted men.

The stalemate continued through the winter of 1979-80 and into the spring of 1980. Tensions reached a peak in early June when there were mounting rumors of an attack by the police or the vigilantes. Finally, on June 13, telephone lines at the Thompson property were mysteriously cut and a crowd of vigilantes set up a barricade at the entrance to Raquette Point, threatening to storm the Mohawk fortress, which still contained seventy people. State troopers arrived on the scene, but they made no effort to disperse the mob. At several points in the afternoon, the troopers threatened to enter Raquette Point. A bloody gunfight seemed possible at any minute.

Ganienkeh and other Iroquois communities were in close contact with the people of Raquette Point, and the Onondagas and Tuscaroras issued warnings that they would cut all power lines and gas lines through their territories in upper New York State if the troopers invaded. The Mohawks of Ganienkeh issued their own threat: if the police attacked at Akwesasne, they would immediately launch a counter-attack against the state police in the Altona area, preventing them from deploying all of their forces at Akwesasne.

In the end, the crisis passed without incident. Tensions began to ease, and in August the vigilantes agreed to take down their barricade at Raquette Point. In 1981, a judge dismissed the indictments against Loran Thompson.

Meanwhile, the warrior movement was evolving separately at Akwesasne. Although they did not begin to call themselves the Warrior Society until the 1980s, a group of Longhouse militants at Akwesasne had participated in most of the warrior projects, from Loon Island to Moss Lake. "It was a cultural movement in those days," recalls Mike Mitchell, the Longhouse activist who became the grand chief (elected chief) of the Canadian side of Akwesasne. "It was a movement for cultural survival. It was commonly known as the warriors."

By the 1980s, as many as a hundred Mohawk men and women were attending monthly Warrior Society meetings at a variety of Mohawk communities and neutral locations such as hotels. "It was not an underground operation," recalls Francis Boots, the war chief at Akwesasne. Indeed, the Akwesasne warriors scarcely bothered to maintain any secrecy. When they met in hotels, the signboard in the lobby would read: "Warrior Society caucus."

Throughout this period, the Longhouse was gaining followers on the Akwesasne reserve. Eventually it came to be perceived as a threat by the Akwesasne elected councils, and the community was split between those who supported the Longhouse and those who were loyal to the councils. The split was worsened by the conflict at Raquette Point. In addition, there were deep religious differences between Christians and Longhouse followers, there were political divisions caused by the international border that bisected the reserve, and there were family feuds that sometimes led to violent disputes. Perhaps most important, the Akwesasne Longhouse was itself split into opposing factions.

Into this divided community came the lure of cigarette smuggling and casinos. The Mohawks of Akwesasne discovered that they could make tremendous profits by selling discount cigarettes, taking advantage of their tax-free status. They also discovered that they could attract customers from all over the northern United States and southern Canada by setting up super-bingos and casinos with slot machines on the U.S. side of the reserve. Bingos and casinos were legally permitted on Indian reservations in New York State if certain conditions were met. Slot machines were illegal, but the Mohawk casino operators believed the state had no right to intervene in sovereign Mohawk territory. The casino operators were supported by about half the Akwesasne Longhouse members, including the warriors, who believed that Canada and the United States were foreign countries with no authority to regulate the cigarette and gambling industries on Akwesasne territory. They regarded the cigarette stores and casinos as a desperately needed source of economic development in a community with a high unemployment rate and few natural resources.

However, another Longhouse faction, which was supported by many others in the community, opposed the gambling industry. They saw it as immoral, illegal, and divisive, and they believed the super-
bingo and casino operators were corrupting the community by introducing an element of greed and materialism.

Despite this controversy, Loran Thompson wanted the Akwesasne Longhouse to share in the profits generated by the gambling industry. He argued that the Longhouse had already sponsored mini-bingos in Akwesasne, and he could see nothing in the Great Law of Peace that prohibited gambling. In 1987 he negotiated an agreement with an investor from Tell City, Indiana, who was willing to establish a super-bingo in Akwesasne and split his profits with the Longhouse. The anti-gambling faction in the Longhouse told Thompson to scrap the project, but he gained support from three clan mothers and decided to proceed with it.

By the second half of the 1980s, huge profits were being earned from cigarettes and gambling at Akwesasne. At the peak, the casinos and super-bingos were employing 450 people and generating millions of dollars in profits. The split within the Longhouse grew worse, and violent confrontations began to occur. Members of the anti-gambling Longhouse faction were joined by Christians and elected council supporters who opposed the casinos. Roadblocks were erected, brawls erupted, and casinos were attacked by anti-gamblers who smashed the slot machines and fired gunshots into the walls.

At Kahnawake, the gambling and cigarette industries provoked less controversy because the community was more unified. There were never any casinos or slot machines on that reserve, and when the Kahnawake Longhouse began planning a super-bingo in 1986, the operation was supported by most community members. Those who opposed the project did not voice their opinions as bitterly, and no violence occurred.

The discount cigarette business — supplied by Mohawks who smuggled U.S. cigarettes across the international border at Akwesasne — was first established at Kahnawake in 1985. The first tobacco tycoons, Phillip Deering and Selma Delisle, were both Longhouse supporters. Although there was some opposition from the community, most of the Kahnawake Mohawks supported the industry, and dozens set up their own “smoke shacks” on the highways that bisected the reserve. Many of the cigarette entrepreneurs were warriors or supporters of the warriors.

Before long, the cigarette industry was generating a steady flow of money for the Kahnawake Longhouse and the warriors. Some of the cigarette retailers at Kahnawake, including Phillip Deering and Selma Delisle, gave a percentage of their sales to the Longhouse. In 1986 and 1987, for example, some retailers gave seventy cents to the Longhouse for every carton of cigarettes they sold. Almost half of this percentage went to the Warrior Society. According to internal Longhouse documents, the warriors were given a total of about $350,000 in payments by cigarette retailers over those two years.

Flush with this money, the Warrior Society of Kahnawake became better organized and its guns became more expensive. A code of conduct for the warriors was drafted on August 24, 1987. It prohibited any consumption of alcohol or drugs, prohibited any theft of property, and required the warriors to follow the Great Law of Peace. “The warriors will, at all times, be a defensive and peace-keeping force and not an offensive force,” the code said. “We will never initiate an action unless so directed by the War Chief or Council of Chiefs with the War Chief in attendance.”

The secret document also outlined the military structure of the Warrior Society. “In times of emergency, the warriors will form into squads,” the code said. “In every squad, one warrior will be designated squad leader and he will be responsible for the squad and communications with the War Chief. Every warrior in a squad will take orders from the squad leader unless his conscience dictates otherwise. The squad leader will choose one of the squad to be his assistant.”

The Warrior Society purchased dozens of portable two-way radios to ensure that the warriors would have rapid mobilization and instant communications in an emergency. The warrior code gave strict rules for communication on this network of two-way radios. The radios are required “for information and direction from the warriors’ office and the War Chief,” the code said. “No personal names will be given over the air. Codes and code names will be used at all times.”

Finally, the warrior code contained a detailed set of rules to govern the use of weapons. It gave a long list of recommended guns, including pump-action shotguns and semi-automatic weapons such as the Ruger Mini-14 and the Colt AR-15. These weapons, which can be fired repeatedly without reloading, can be legally purchased from gun retail-
ers at a cost of $600 to $1,200 each. The code specified that each warrior must have 100 rounds of ammunition for every gun in his possession.

"No weapon is to be discharged while on duty except at a target," the code said. "Weapons will be kept out of sight at all times, except during emergency situations. All weapons will be carried pointing up or down, the chamber empty and the safety on. No weapon will have a round in the chamber except in an emergency situation. Any violation of this rule may lead to confiscation of the weapon."

By 1988, the cigarette trade was flourishing at Kahnawake and the Warrior Society was stronger than ever. The federal and provincial governments were losing millions of dollars in unpaid taxes and duties from the bootleg tobacco. When the Mohawks heard rumours of an impending police raid at Kahnawake, the Longhouse warned that any police raid would be regarded as an invasion of sovereign Mohawk territory.

On June 1, 1988, two hundred RCMP officers swarmed onto the Kahnawake reserve in a massive raid on six cigarette stores. Backed by helicopters and riot squads, the police wore bullet-proof vests and carried semi-automatic weapons as they arrested seventeen people and seized $450,000 in cigarettes. Selma Delisle was among those arrested in the military-style operation. When she arrived at her cigarette store, the RCMP grabbed her by the ankles and dragged her out of her car. One of the police officers held a gun to her head until she was handcuffed and taken away.

It was not just the military overtones of the invasion that angered the Mohawks. They also viewed the raid as a serious threat to their sovereignty. No outside police force had entered Kahnawake in such massive numbers since 1973. The RCMP raid seemed to jeopardize the hard-won autonomy of the community.

Within an hour of the police raid, the warriors had seized the Mercier Bridge. They mobilized trucks and bulldozers to close every highway that passed through the reserve and dumped gravel on the roads to ensure that motorists could not get through. Armed with semi-automatic weapons and baseball bats, the warriors kept the bridge closed for twenty-nine hours, creating traffic chaos in all of Montreal's south-shore suburbs. The Mohawks finally lifted the blockade when provincial and federal officials agreed to negotiations on the cigarette issue.

Although the warriors were at the vanguard of the Mercier Bridge blockade in 1988, they were supported by hundreds of ordinary Mohawks who were infuriated by the massive police raid. Even those who had opposed the bootleg cigarette industry were disturbed by the police invasion. The events of 1988 gave new support and legitimacy to the warriors, who were now regarded as defenders of the community.

It was a spontaneous reaction to the RCMP raid, but the seizure of the Mercier Bridge became a dress rehearsal for the blockade of the bridge in 1990. The takeover went smoothly, without a hitch. From then on, it became an unspoken emergency plan. If the Mohawks were attacked, the bridge could be seized again.

A year after the first seizure of the Mercier Bridge, the warriors of Akwesasne established their own territorial patrol to guard against police raids. For these warriors, the greatest threat was the possibility of a police crackdown on the lucrative casinos and super-bingo operations on the U.S. side of the reserve. State troopers had raided seven of the casinos in June of 1989, hauling away slot machines and laying charges against the owners. Shortly after those raids, the warriors held a meeting at the Bear's Den, a restaurant and casino on the U.S. side of Akwesasne, and decided to establish an armed patrol to keep an eye out for state troopers who might be raiding the Mohawk territory.

They called it the Mohawk Sovereign Security Force (MSSF), but it was essentially the Warrior Society of Akwesasne. Its headquarters was the Akwesasne warrior base, and its ideological justification, once again, was the principle of Mohawk nationhood. Any police raid at Akwesasne would be regarded as a violation of Mohawk sovereignty.

The members of the patrol were paid about $300 a week, financed by regular donations from the casinos and cigarette retailers. The patrol had eight vehicles, each painted white and marked with MSSF signs. When the troopers needed to enter the reserve to investigate an accident or a criminal offence, they telephoned the MSSF office and requested an escort from the patrol.

Early in 1990, the casino dispute at Akwesasne escalated to the brink of civil war. The anti-gambling faction put up barricades on a
number of Akwesasne's highways in March of 1990 to try to keep customers away from the casinos. Violence flared at the barricades over the following weeks, leading to an all-out gunfight which killed two Mohawks on May 1, 1990. Within a few hours of the shootings, hundreds of New York state troopers and Canadian police officers took control of the reserve. The police effectively ended the MSSF security patrols — but the Akwesasne Warrior Society remained alive.

As the Akwesasne civil war was raging, another armed confrontation was taking place at Ganienkeh. A military helicopter, flying over the community on an emergency medical mission, was hit by three rounds of AK-47 gunfire on March 30, 1990. One of the bullets wounded a civilian doctor on the helicopter. Another damaged the helicopter's hydraulic line, forcing it to make an emergency landing near Ganienkeh.

The state police set up roadblocks on the highways around Ganienkeh. They asked for permission to enter the Mohawk territory to investigate the shooting, but the Mohawks refused. It was the same policy they had followed for sixteen years — no foreign agencies were permitted to set foot on their territory.

Warriors from Kahnawake rushed down to Ganienkeh to help their sister community. Arriving within a few hours of the helicopter shooting, they helped establish a set of checkpoints and barricades to defend Ganienkeh against any attempt by the state troopers to enter the territory. The Mohawks denied they had fired any shots at the helicopter and Mario Cuomo, the governor of New York, hinted that the gunshots might have been fired by local residents who were trying to discredit the Mohawks.

Cuomo had developed a good working relationship with the Ganienkeh Mohawks over the previous fourteen years. As the New York secretary of state, he had negotiated with them when they were still at Moss Lake. A number of the warrior leaders — including Paul Delaronde and Art Montour — were invited to Cuomo's inauguration when he became governor.

Despite the Mohawk denials and the hints from the governor, the state police insisted that the gunshots had come from a building in Ganienkeh. They gave deadlines and ultimatums to the Mohawks who manned the barricades, but the warriors refused to comply. "The potential for violence was very high," one warrior said.

Finally, after eleven days, the Mohawks agreed to let the police enter the territory — but only to search one building for a two-hour period. The troopers seemed to find little evidence at the site, and no charges were laid in connection with the shooting.

However, warrants were issued for the arrest of sixteen Mohawks in connection with the barricade activity at Ganienkeh. They were charged with illegal use of firearms, assaulting police officers who were executing a search warrant, and resisting the execution of a search warrant. Only a small handful of those warriors were apprehended. Some of them remained at Ganienkeh, refusing to leave the territory. Others quietly slipped back to Kahnawake and Kanesatake to help the warriors at the barricades in the summer of 1990.

Today, the Mohawks of Ganienkeh are more secretive and militarized than ever. Their Longhouse is too small to support a full council of chiefs, but they do have a war chief. Everyone in Ganienkeh has a gun. They use cellular telephones and two-way radios for communication, and they have stockpiled enough food to allow them to survive for years if they are blockaded. To prevent any threat of government control, they refuse to accept welfare or government grants.

After almost two decades of confrontations with state troopers, the Mohawks are convinced that police spies are trying to infiltrate Ganienkeh. They refuse to permit any outsider to venture past the outskirts of their territory, and they investigate anyone who requests permission to visit the community. To protect themselves from police raids, they conduct regular patrols of their territory. "We're very familiar with the land here," says Darryl Martin, a warrior who has lived in Ganienkeh for fourteen years. "Our intimate knowledge of the land gives us an advantage. If the troopers come in, they'd have to walk through heavy bush for miles."

After the armed siege at Ganienkeh in the spring of 1990, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Paul Delaronde. By then, he was beyond the reach of the police, behind the barricades at Kahnawake, where he remained a key strategist for the Mohawks during the summer of 1990. Although he was not a military leader at the barricades, he spoke forcefully at Kahnawake community meetings throughout the crisis.
Whenever he spoke, the warriors fell silent and listened closely. He was only thirty-seven, but he had become a respected elder statesman among the warriors.

Early in 1991, Paul Delaronde continued to elude the police. Taking careful precautions, he travelled back and forth to Kahnawake, where he could sometimes be spotted with his four adopted children at the Kahnawake flea market on Sunday mornings. He was still a striking figure — a handsome man, unshaven, his hair long and light brown. The young warriors, teasing him about the motorcycle he sometimes drove, called him “Peter Fonda.” But he preferred a different nickname. As he cuddled an infant daughter, he called himself “Mr. Mom.” He was weary of the limelight, fed up with the police investigators and media hounds who saw him as the ringleader of the warriors.

For the past two decades, the story of Paul Delaronde has been inseparable from the story of the warriors. It has become a life of almost permanent conflict — a life of barricades and weapons and bunkers. For him, and for the warriors he has inspired, the dangers of an armed standoff are scarcely noticed anymore. They are simply viewed as a normal risk in the gamble of daily life.

The barricades at Kanesatake and Kahnawake in the summer of 1990 were just the latest in a twenty-two-year series of tense standoffs between warriors and police forces. But there was one crucial difference in 1990. Until the events of July 11, the police had always backed away from the ultimate confrontation. Until the raid at Oka, they had never dared to attack.

CHAPTER 9

Food Smugglers and Gun Runners

Behind the Barricades at Kanesatake

A tall white pine loomed over the warriors as they peered up into the thick foliage. “If you’re up there, you’re coming down with the tree,” a warrior named Apache yelled. He yanked the cord on the chainsaw, and it sputtered to life. The saw chewed into the bark of the tree. A police sniper, perched on the branch of the tree next to it, hurled himself to the ground ten metres below, then picked himself up and fled towards the town of Oka.

The atmosphere in the Pines was electric. Just a couple of hours earlier, the Sûreté du Québec’s tactical intervention team had launched an attack on the Mohawks occupying the Pines. The warriors, hidden in the dense forest, had exchanged gunfire with the police. As soon as the SQ realized one of their men had been hurt in the exchange, they beat a swift retreat, right behind the ambulance that sped off to a hospital in St. Eustache with the fatally wounded Corporal Marcel Lemay. The Mohawks were convinced that the police were preparing for a second attack. Already hundreds of police reinforcements were massed in the town of Oka, and the police were setting up checkpoints on every road leading into Kanesatake. An SQ helicopter circled in the sky overhead. One Mohawk, who had been allowed to pass police blockades to go to work in Montreal, called back to warn his people that at least one hundred police cars had gathered at Parc