

Megan Mahoney  
Hudson River Valley Institute Internship  
Professor J. Schaaf  
March 26, 2010  
Chapter Entry #5

### Warfare and Weapons in the Hudson River Valley

The Native Americans of the Hudson River Valley were primarily peaceful tribes, and rarely engaged in intertribal warfare. In the event a conflict arose, treaties were utilized to settle disputes. These useful tools addressed a vast array of topics such as guaranteeing hunting and fishing rights, as well as regulating commerce. The weapons used by Native Americans demonstrate characteristics of resourcefulness and skill. Designed to prey on enemies and animals alike, weapons served as security against adversaries.

The arrival of the Europeans ignited conflict within the Native American community. The Fur Trade is considered to be the most blameworthy event as it radicalized inter-tribal relations as well as heightening tensions with Europeans. Clashes with the Dutch can be exemplified through the Pavonia Massacre of 1643. In this case Dutch militia killed a group of Wappinger Indians.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the native tribe pulled together and sought revenge burning many of the settlements of Pavonia.

Native American battlefield tactics worked well within the forests of New England. According to historian David Jones, "Indian warriors did not simply hide behind trees, but exploited available cover to conduct moving fire on the enemy...quickly

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Alfieri, "The Lenapes: A Study of Hudson Valley Indians," accessed March 17, 2010, <file:///F:/hudson/indexm.htm>

enveloped them in a horseshoe fashion.”<sup>2</sup> Mahican and Wappinger Indians were able to conduct organized advances and retreat where warriors with loaded weapons protected those who recharged. Known as “blackbird fashion,” this particular battle tactic distinguishes Hudson River Valley Native Americans from other tribes.<sup>3</sup> Traditional face-to-face combat was also used, occasionally allowing small numbered groups to speak to each other and fight comparable to duel manner.

In addition to advanced fighting strategies, the Hudson River Valley Native Americans had a wide variety of weapons for both catching food, as well as battling enemies. Hunters and warriors preferred bows and arrows, spears, and axes, while fishermen favored spears and nets. Several instances of natives using fire arrows on enemy forts have been recorded. Additionally, Native Americans were able to “poison” arrows with a combination of bark, root, and a bush whose identity remains unknown.<sup>4</sup> When Henry Hudson arrived, the Native Americans protected themselves with a square shield of durable leather. As European influence continued to spread, guns began to replace traditional weapons.

After analyzing the fighting techniques and weapons of the Hudson River Valley Native Americans, their ability to unite in an effort to defeat their European opponents is apparent. However, modern technology proved to be formidable competition, and their weapons appeared antiquated when juxtaposed to European artillery.

---

<sup>2</sup> David E. Jones, *Native North American Armor, Shields, and Fortifications* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*