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**A POX ON AMHERST:  
SMALLPOX, SIR JEFFERY, AND A TOWN NAMED AMHERST**

**By**

**Francis E. Flavin**

During the autumn of 2001 the East Coast of America found itself under biological attack. Letters addressed to several prominent citizens had been intentionally tainted with deadly anthrax bacteria. As these anthrax-laced letters made their way through the postal system they contaminated mail rooms, offices, and people who handled them. However widely known that anthrax attack may be, it is not the East Coast's most controversial episode involving biological warfare. That distinction belongs to the episode in which the British army distributed smallpox-contaminated blankets to the Indians of Pennsylvania. Many people believe that Jeffery Amherst, a "lobster-backed general" who once commanded the British military in colonial America, perpetrated a "genocide" by ordering "the distribution of smallpox blankets to Native Americans in 1763."<sup>1</sup>

Smallpox is one of the several infections in the Poxvirus family. It is both an intracellular and an extracellular pathogen, meaning that it may be transmitted either by the fusion of infected cells with uninfected

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<sup>1</sup> John Furbish, "Norwottuck would be a better name for Amherst," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, "Letters" section, 14 March 2000 (page unknown); Frances T. Paine, "Amherst should mull changing its name," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, "Letters" section, 4-5 March 2000 (page unknown). "Lobster-backed" quote from Furbish; "Genocide" and "distribution" quote from Paine.

cells, or by the release of the virus from an infected cell into the fluid around it.<sup>2</sup>

Variola, as smallpox is sometimes called, is commonly spread via the respiratory tract when one inhales infected droplets or dust particles. Once the victim has been contaminated with the virus, symptoms will begin to appear in about ten to twelve days. A very high fever, quick pulse, severe headache, pains in the back, pains in the loins, and vomiting are the first symptoms which often last for a period of about three days.<sup>3</sup> Next will appear a red rash, resembling small, almost brick-shaped blisters. The rash usually begins at the hairline and will gradually cover the rest of the body. During the next week, the pimples will become larger as they fill with pus. Scabs will form over the pustules and eventually fall off on about the third or fourth week, leaving unattractive scars.

The lethality of smallpox depends upon a number of factors, but when it has been an epidemic, it has shown itself to be a reliable assassin. The origin of smallpox is unknown; however, it is thought to have originated in Central Africa or India. It has been with humankind for thousands of years -- convincing evidence is presented by the mummy of Ramses V. The Egyptian pharaoh died in 1157 B.C., presumably of smallpox.<sup>4</sup>

Up until recent times, the disease has been a universally-feared killer, knowing not the bounds of age, race, or class. So rampant was this disease during the Middle Ages that people in Africa, Europe, and Asia regarded it as one of life's inevitabilities.

The first significant steps to scientifically control the disease were taken in the early eighteenth century. The practice of inoculation had been known for some time among the peoples of Africa and Asia and was slowly being discovered by Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Inoculation involved

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Baron, *Medical Microbiology—The Third Edition* (Churchill Livingstone, New York, 1991), 610.

<sup>3</sup> John Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America* (Kennikat Press, New York, 1972), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983), 164, Plate 2.

<sup>5</sup> Duffy, 24-25.

transplanting pus from smallpox blisters into an incision in the skin of an uninfected person. A recipient of the treatment would undergo a mild infection and subsequently and temporarily acquire immunity from the disease.

British scientists were familiar with this method as early as 1700. In 1714 and 1716, letters to England's Royal Society confirmed the existence of inoculation and described the procedure in detail.<sup>6</sup> With a famous April 1717 letter of support to a friend in London and her voluntary submission of her children to the practice, Lady Montague, wife of the British ambassador to Turkey, provided the necessary impetus for the procedure to gain attention among England's upper class.<sup>7</sup>

The practice of inoculation was first introduced to North America in colonial Massachusetts. This occurred when Dr. William Douglas of Boston lent his copy of the Royal Society's reports on inoculation to Cotton Mather. Although initially unsure of the concept, Mather's African servant, Onesimus, confirmed the practice and thereby convinced Mather of its viability. Dr. Zabdiel Boylston was Mather's only supporter among the medical community of Boston.

In 1721, a smallpox epidemic erupted in Boston and furnished Mather an opportunity to test his immunological hunch. Of the three hundred people that Mather and Boylston inoculated, only six died -- a fatality rate of two percent. Yet, of those naturally infected, there prevailed a fourteen percent fatality rate. Cotton Mather, nevertheless, did not emerge a hero. Instead, he and Boylston were the targets of public harangue, articles of condemnation, and vandalism. A homemade grenade was hurled into the home of Cotton Mather. The grenade failed to explode, and the attached note left no doubt as to what incurred such ire -- "Cotton Mather, you dog. Damn you! I'll inoculate you with this with a pox to you."<sup>8</sup> Apparently the Bostonians objected to interference with what they perceived to be the will of God. They trusted that only

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>7</sup> Hopkins, 47-49. See pp. 48-49 for a discussion of the instrumental roles of Sir Hans Sloane and Charles Maitland in gaining the acceptability of inoculation in England.

<sup>8</sup> Hopkins, 250.

the sinful would be infected, and that the Lord would spare the just. Other cities shared these sentiments, and despite the advocacy of Benjamin Franklin and the 1726 publication of Boylston's *Historical Account of the Small-Pox Inoculated in New England*, the practice of inoculation did not gain widespread acceptance until about 1750.<sup>9</sup>

England's Edward Jenner delivered the blow that was the death-knell of smallpox. As a young boy he had heard a country girl boast that because she had already contracted *cowpox*, she was not afraid of contracting *smallpox*.<sup>10</sup> Cowpox is a relatively mild disease that causes blistering on the udders of cattle and can be transmitted to humans as well. It was neither the practice of inoculation in general nor the practice of inoculating against smallpox with smallpox that Jenner discovered – these practices had long been known. What Jenner is credited for is his exploration of the fruitful possibilities of inoculating against smallpox with a less virulent member of the poxvirus family.

In 1789 there was an outbreak of swinepox and Jenner inoculated three people with pustules from this infection. The next year, these same people were inoculated with smallpox but had no reaction. Jenner paid little heed to the implications of this and instead collected cases of “cowpoxed milkers who were said to have resisted smallpox inoculations.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1796 Jenner, who was himself experienced in the art of inoculation, began to infect people first with the far more benign cowpox and then with smallpox. As he had surmised, the smallpox virus could produce no effect. This was Jenner's great discovery. He submitted a letter to the Royal Society who coolly rejected his claim.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, another outbreak of cowpox afforded him the occasion to test his hypothesis further. This he did and with renewed confidence he announced his findings to the world.

Edward Jenner did not “discover” the saving power of cowpox, for others – such as the country girl – were at least vaguely aware of it

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<sup>9</sup> Duffy, 250.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, 78-79.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

before he was.<sup>13</sup> Instead he provided the vaccine with its official introduction and unquestionably established it as legitimate medicine where it had once been but speculative nostrum.

Jenner went so far as to predict the eradication of this scourge of humanity; and one hundred and eighty years later, in 1977, the World Health Organization recorded the last known case of smallpox. And although a small handful of laboratories around the world continued to store small quantities of the virus, in 1980 the disease was officially declared to be "extinct."<sup>14</sup>

Smallpox claimed millions of lives during its time on earth. For hundreds upon hundreds of years, it cyclically ravaged the continents Europe, Africa, and Asia. Because this disease had been confined to the three aforementioned land masses, an interesting phenomenon occurred when Christopher Columbus brought together the Old World and the New: "virgin soil epidemics" enormously depopulated the indigenous peoples of the Americas.<sup>15</sup>

Virgin soil epidemics occur when a civilization is exposed to a previously unknown disease and is hence immunologically defenseless. This is exactly what happened to the indigenous nations of the Western Hemisphere. Over time, countless generations of Asians, Africans, and Europeans had been exposed to various diseases and a subtle form of genetic selection developed.<sup>16</sup> It was likely that those who were genetically the least able to deal with a sickness made up a preponderance of the fatalities, removing themselves from the topical population and therefore strengthening the gene pool. The natives of the New World had no such qualifications.

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<sup>13</sup> See Hopkins, p. 80, for a more complete discussion of valid claims to the discovery of a smallpox vaccine.

<sup>14</sup> It is now believed that smallpox specimens exist in secret storage facilities and at some point may be weaponized and delivered to human populations.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., "Virgin-Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>d</sup> ser., XXXIII (1976), 289-299. The footnote is in recognition of Crosby's prior use of the phrase "Virgin Soil Epidemic."

<sup>16</sup> Stewart, Elizabeth, Visiting Microbiology Professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Telephone interview conducted by Francis Flavin. October 20, 1992.

Furthermore, and perhaps more important, many of these diseases promised an induced resistance to those who survived. This translated into a very deadly reality for the American Indians—it meant that upon first contact, a “virgin soil epidemic” could claim an entire tribe or village. Nobody would be immune from a previous infection and consequently everyone was susceptible.<sup>17</sup>

There have been many accounts of the horror that abounds when disease strikes an Indian community. During the years of 1616-1619 an epidemic, perhaps either bubonic or pneumonic plague, ravaged the coast of New England from Cape Cod to Maine. It is believed that the fatality rate was approximately ninety percent.<sup>18</sup> In the 1630s smallpox swept through New England, and during the epidemic William Bradford, writing from Plymouth, Massachusetts, recorded one of the most sorrowfully poignant descriptions of the havoc that was so often wrought upon an Indian village:

they fell down so generally of this disease as they were in the end not able to help one another, no not to make a fire nor to fetch a little water to drink, nor any to bury the dead. But would strive as long as they could, and when they could procure no other means to make fire, they would burn the wooden trays and dishes that they ate their meat in, and their very bows and arrows. And some would crawl out on all fours to get a little water, and sometimes die by the way and not to be able to get in again.<sup>19</sup>

Because of their extreme vulnerability, large percentages of the community would be incapacitated at one time. Efforts to hunt, fish, gather firewood, fetch water, and plant or harvest crops would be

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<sup>17</sup> Historian Alfred Crosby deserves credit for coining the phrase “virgin soil epidemic” (see note 14).

<sup>18</sup> Crosby, “Virgin-Soil Epidemics...,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 290.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

crippled and therefore claim additional lives that might otherwise have been saved.

The crowded interiors of Indian dwellings and their frequent communal contacts contributed to the transmission of the virus, and one method of treatment, a sweatbath followed by a plunge in cold water, was actually detrimental. Some Indians believed that smallpox “had eyes” and would attack those who were afraid, they thought it best to stand defiantly by – and the tragic results were predictable.<sup>20</sup> Fatality rates averaged around thirty-five percent, and figures as high as ninety percent were not uncommon.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, those who fled served as carriers and brought the affliction to neighboring bands.

It would not have taken an exceptionally astute colonist to fathom the biological vulnerability of the Indians. Fur traders and missionaries witnessed many of these events firsthand. Although some of the Indians were quick to understand that their illness was brought upon them by their visitors, their realizations often came too late. Many English settlers were aware of the virulent effect that smallpox had upon their indigenous neighbors. They viewed Indians as an obstacle to progress, and so chose to construe the plague as an act of God, giving the English title to Indian lands. John Winthrop credited God “in sweeping away great multitudes of natives” from New England, “that he might make room for us there.”<sup>22</sup>

It is, therefore, plausible that one might conceive of orchestrating smallpox outbreaks among the Indians. A 1752 letter by New York colonist M. de Loungueuil evidences the existence of such a concept. “Twere desirable that it [i.e. smallpox] should break out and spread generally throughout the localities inhabited by our rebels. It would be fully as good as an army.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hopkins, 237.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>22</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Wang and Hill, 1983), 90.

<sup>23</sup> E. Wagner Stearn, and Allen E. Stearn, *The Effect of Smallpox on the Destiny of the Amerindian* (Bruce Humphries, Inc. Publishers, Boston, 1945), 42-43.



In 1792 detractors of Detroit's Judge Powell forged a letter to General Knox. It suggested, among other things, how the Americans might destroy the Northwestern Indians, with whom they were currently at war, by infecting prisoners with smallpox and sending them back to their tribes to spread the disease.<sup>24</sup>

The Indians for their part did not put such acts beyond their acquisitive neighbors. According to a participating chief's testimony, the 1812 Fort Dearborn massacre was retaliation for just such a deed. A day or two before the attack, a certain Captain Heald had reputedly contaminated with smallpox the goods he had delivered to the Indians, thus provoking the attack.<sup>25</sup>

Records indicate that in 1763 a Californian Indian received a piece of cloth from a Spaniard who had recently recovered from smallpox. Through that transaction, the disease was communicated to an Indian mission and within three months over 100 natives had died.<sup>26</sup> No evidence exists, however, that this act was perpetrated with malicious forethought. Interestingly enough it was this same year, 1763, that General Jeffery Amherst partook in perhaps the most widely known and egregious alleged attempt to spread disease among the Indians.

Jeffery Amherst was born on January 29, 1717 to a well-to-do British family. He had an illustrious military career and reaped laurels during the War of Austrian Succession and the French and Indian War. A true paragon of a British military officer, he was efficient, proper and habitually thorough. As was true with so many of his high-ranking contemporaries, Amherst was supremely proud and honored to be an officer in the military, serving the British Crown. Amherst also believed that his country was the greatest on earth – certainly a tenable argument for a mid-eighteenth century European mind, especially after the annus mirabilis, the "miracle year" of 1759 during which the British took Quebec and drove the French from India.

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<sup>24</sup> "News and Comment," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 21 (1925-26), 295-296.

<sup>25</sup> "News and Comment," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 21 (1925-26), 295-296.

<sup>26</sup> Stearn, 44.

Amherst was quite successful commanding his troops in America. In 1757 Amherst was given a force of 11,000 men with which to capture the French stronghold, Louisbourg, at the mouth of the St. Lawrence. The next year, Amherst took his quarry. Amherst then laid siege to Montreal, and in 1760 the French capitulated. His efforts helped the British to wrest control of Canada away from the French. In reward for his military *éclat* and success in the campaigns against the French in Canada, Jeffery Amherst was appointed commander-in-chief for His Majesty's forces in North America.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately for Amherst's historical reputation, this appointment would soon bring him into a showdown with the American Indians, a people whom he regarded with utter contempt.

Shortly after he accepted his commission, Amherst began to implement a general crackdown on cordial relations with the indigenous tribes. Contrary to the beliefs of Indian Affairs Officer William Johnson, Amherst saw no reason to maintain a state of comity with the Indians, a people whom Amherst believed to be inferior. Amherst's policies would increasingly aggravate the traditionally English-aligned Iroquois, and even more so the Indians who had been allies of the French. These Indians, such as the Shawnees, Ottawas, and the Potawatomis, were shocked and disappointed when the French capitulated and ceded Canada in 1760. Nevertheless, they hoped that someday the governor of New France – whom they called Onontio, their “father” – would come again to liberate his Indian children from the oppressive British rule.<sup>28</sup>

The etiquette of gift-giving and the recognition of obligation and reciprocity were important to French-Indian relations. The French accommodated Indian customs and expectations and participated in a cultural “middle ground” with their Native American neighbors.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the French and the Indians enjoyed relatively amicable

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Shaw Mayo, *Jeffery Amherst -- A Biography* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1916), 114.

<sup>28</sup> Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The Patriot Chiefs* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 97, 104-109; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 269-285.

<sup>29</sup> See White, *passim*.

relations. However, Amherst had no interest in adjusting his policies to serve native needs. Amherst implemented authoritarian and control-oriented policies that consisted of extreme retrenchment in the etiquette of gift-giving. He felt there was no reason why “the Crown should be put to that expense.” Amherst directed his subordinates to distribute no ammunition to the Indians and to provide them food only when it was a dire necessity. Thus, the natives would be busy themselves in hunting and would “not have leisure to hatch mischief.” Furthermore, he wrote to William Johnson, “Services must be rewarded; ...purchasing the good behavior of either Indians or any others...is what I do not understand. When men of whatsoever race behave ill, they must be punished but not bribed.”<sup>30</sup>

Amherst was under pressure to cut expenses because the Seven Years War – also called the French and Indian War – had been a significant drain on the royal treasury. However, the prohibition of gifts offended the Indians who believed that gifts were a common courtesy and a convention; furthermore, it has been argued that the Indians believed that the English owed them “rent” in exchange for the use of native land.<sup>31</sup> Amherst’s policies put the natives in a difficult situation: the Indians had grown dependent on British armaments for hunting purposes, and since food was no longer being given out at the forts, they found it difficult to sustain themselves using non-European weaponry.<sup>32</sup> Yet another aggravation was the fact that Amherst forbade traders to trade alcohol to the Indians and to enforce this rule he decreed that the traders could no longer visit the Indians in their home villages. Instead, the Indians were denied alcohol and were inconvenienced by having to bring their wares to the English forts.

Amherst’s policies engendered both cultural and economic consternation among the Indians; these policies, combined with an incessant flow of English settlers, traders, and soldiers into native lands,

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<sup>30</sup> Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 72.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune* (W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1988), 441.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

produced a steadily growing unrest among the neighboring tribes.<sup>33</sup> Trouble came to a head in the spring of 1763 when there occurred a simultaneous uprising of Great Lakes Indians from tribes such as the Ottawa, Seneca, Delaware, Potawatomi, Ojibwa, Shawnee, Miami, Sauk, Wea, and Huron. This war is often and inaccurately referred to as "Pontiac's Rebellion," or the "Conspiracy of Pontiac." Pontiac was a persuasive and charismatic war leader of the Ottawa nation. He coordinated and led the assault on Fort Detroit on May 9, 1763, and although unsuccessful in capturing the fort, he managed to maintain a siege until his coalition disbanded in the end of July. He has been called the "spark that, falling on the tinder, set the woods aflame."<sup>34</sup> Pontiac was certainly an advocate of the war but was by no means the omnipotent pan-Indian general and organizer that he is sometimes portrayed to be. Pontiac himself claimed to have waged war "solely on repeated invitations made me by the Delawares, Iroquois, and Shawnees."<sup>35</sup> The Indians' widespread dissatisfaction with their British neighbors provided a unifying cause and sufficient reason for conflict.

The Indian allies sacked several major forts on the British frontier, including Sandusky, St. Joseph, Michilmackinac, Miami, Venango, Le Boeuf, and Presq' Isle, punishing British soldiers and settlers wherever they might be found. As Bouquet himself wrote, "every tree is become an Indian for the terrified inhabitant," and terror reigned supreme on the frontier as marauding Indian scalping parties impelled many an English settler to abandon his home and flee eastward.<sup>36</sup> General Amherst was

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter vii, "Anger of the Indians.—The Conspiracy," in Parkman's *Conspiracy of Pontiac* for a general account of the aggrieved condition of the Indians that precipitated the uprising.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 115.

<sup>35</sup> Jennings, 442; White, 270.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase "every tree is become an Indian for the terrified inhabitant" is used in a letter from Bouquet to Amherst describing the general pandemonium and fear resulting from the Indian uprising. Bouquet did not believe there to be a large Native American war party presence in Pennsylvania at the moment; however, the Pennsylvania colonists were in a state of "general panick" due to the perceived threat from Indian warriors. Furthermore, the success of Indian war parties to the northwest of Pennsylvania added to the general public fear. See Waddell, "Bouquet to J. Amherst, June 29, 1763," 270-271.

stunned when he realized that within two months he had lost every post in the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes regions except Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt. It was during these uncertain times that Jeffery Amherst forever tarnished his reputation by supposedly resorting to germ warfare.

There are three major historical actors connected with the alleged germ warfare event: General Jeffery Amherst, Colonel Henry Bouquet, and Captain Simeon Ecuyer.

General Jeffery Amherst, as mentioned before, was commander-in-chief of British forces in North America. He viewed his Indian adversaries with extreme contempt. From his headquarters in New York, General Amherst would attempt to quell this Indian insurrection.

Swiss soldier of fortune, Colonel Henry Bouquet, was en route from his headquarters in Philadelphia to relieve Fort Pitt during the time period in question. His bearing was composed and dignified, and he was a faithful and resourceful soldier.<sup>37</sup> Francis Parkman's *Conspiracy of Pontiac* claims he was "without those arrogant prejudices which had impaired the efficiency of many good British officers."<sup>38</sup>

Stationed at Fort Pitt and reporting to Colonel Bouquet was another Swiss mercenary, Captain Simeon Ecuyer. Upon reading Parkman's account, one cannot help but give him credit for his savvy, organized, and ultimately successful defense of Fort Pitt.

To simplify the events under scrutiny, Henry Bouquet wrote to Amherst on June 23, 1763 and, among other things, informed him that smallpox had broken out at Fort Pitt. In a subsequent letter, Bouquet apprised Amherst of the loss of several British posts on the frontier, describing the Indian's treachery in taking the forts.<sup>39</sup> It was in response to the latter missive that Amherst suggested transmitting smallpox to the Indians. Bouquet responded that he would endeavor to do so by means of infected blankets. There is no evidence at all that Bouquet ever carried out the plan. Rather, two weeks before Amherst suggested the idea, infected blankets were given to two visiting Indian chiefs during a parley at Fort Pitt.

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<sup>37</sup> Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 2 (New York: The Library of America, 1991), 641-642.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 642.

<sup>39</sup> Bernhard Knollenberg, "General Amherst and Germ Warfare," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 41 (December 1954), 491.

Before putting forth an analysis, it is necessary to examine the contents of these letters in more detail. Much of what is to follow is taken from Bernhard Knollenberg's article in the December 1954 issue of *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*,<sup>40</sup> which in turn borrows heavily from the 19-volume *Papers of Henry Bouquet*.<sup>41</sup>

June 23, 1763: Bouquet, then in Philadelphia, forwarded to Amherst Ecuyer's report on an Indian uprising in the Fort Pitt area. Amherst is also told of the unlucky outbreak of smallpox in the fort for which Ecuyer had built a hospital underneath the drawbridge to quarantine the infected from the uninfected.

June 23, 1763: Amherst wrote to Bouquet to inform him of Pontiac's attempt on Fort Detroit, and conveyed news of the killings of several British officers. Amherst added "I cannot but wish, that Whenever we have any of the Savages in our Power, who have in so Treacherous a way Committed any Barbarities on our People, a Quick Retaliation be made, without the least Exception or hesitation." This letter mentioned nothing of smallpox; however, it reveals that Amherst wished to deal with the Indians in a forceful and summary fashion.

June 23 or 24, 1763: A trader at Fort Pitt by the name of William Trent contributed perhaps the key testimony from his journal when he describes the visit of two Delaware Indians. Simeon Ecuyer parleyed with Turtle's Heart and Mamaltee, and Turtle's Heart warned Ecuyer that "all your forts and strong places from this backwards are all burnt and cut off" and that "six different nations of Indians...are now ready to attack you." The Delaware chiefs advised Ecuyer to abandon the fort and come with them. Ecuyer, however, was suspect of their motives. A favorite ruse of the Indians was to gain entrance to a fort under the guise of friendship

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 490-493.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Waddell, editor, *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, (Harrisburg : Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1994) vol. 6 of 6 vols. The 19-volume edition used by Knollenberg is not widely available.

or assistance and once inside, turn on the defenders -- Ecuyer was aware of this. Pontiac had unsuccessfully attempted such a ruse at Detroit, the Senecas had completely wiped out Venango in such a fashion, and the Ojibwas had likewise used deception to their benefit in taking Michilimackinac. Ecuyer, suspecting deception on the part of the Indians, spurned Turtle's Heart's and Mamaltee's advice to abandon the fort.<sup>42</sup> Trader William Trent recorded in his journal "Out of regard to them we gave them two Blankets and an Handkerchief out of the Small Pox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps Ecuyer had decided to fight treachery with treachery, and Trent's journal entry is the concrete evidence that the British at Fort Pitt distributed contaminated blankets to the Indians.

June 24 and 25, 1763: Indian agent Alexander McKee wrote to his superior, William Johnson, to report on Ecuyer's conference with the Delawares. He indicated that the Indians were given "Provisions and Liquor" to carry home, but no mention was made of the blankets or the handkerchief. One wonders whether Ecuyer knew that the blankets came from the smallpox hospital. Ecuyer may have ordered that blankets be taken from the smallpox hospital or the infected blankets may have been delivered to the parley by a subordinate without Ecuyer's knowing of the immediate provenance of the blankets. The record is mute on this question.

June 25, 1763: Bouquet, then near Lancaster, replied to Amherst's message of June 23. Bouquet showed his pique by condemning the "infernal treachery" of the Indians -- "the vilest of brutes" -- and expressed his hopes that the English could "take an adequate revenge on the barbarians" to avenge the massacres of Englishmen in Detroit. Bouquet then looked to Amherst for orders "to act in

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<sup>42</sup> Waddell, "Discourse between Delawares and Ecuyer," 261. For a transcription of Turtle's Heart's speech and Ecuyer's reply, see Parkman, vol. 2, 629-603. Sources are unclear as to whether this parley occurred on June 23 or June 24.

<sup>43</sup> A.T. Volwiler, "William Trent's Journal at Fort Pitt, 1763," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 21 (December 1924) 400.

conjunction with the Rest of your Forces to extirpate that Vermine from a Country they have forfeited, and with it all Claim to the Rights of Humanity." Bouquet, frustrated with the uncertain states of Indian allegiances, noted that he "would rather choose the liberty to kill any Savage that may come in our Way, than to be perpetually doubtful whether they are friends or foes."<sup>44</sup> This suggests Bouquet's patience was quite attenuated and that he was willing to contemplate total war.

June 26, 1763: Ecuyer wrote Bouquet to update him on the events at Fort Pitt. He also enclosed a copy of McKee's report. Ecuyer gave no intimation of the gift to the Delawares of blankets and a handkerchief. Thus, a situation was developing in which Ecuyer or someone in Fort Pitt – without orders – had given contaminated blankets to the Indians and Ecuyer was either intentionally or unintentionally concealing these actions from his superiors. Meanwhile, Amherst and Bouquet were becoming increasingly alarmed at the deteriorating state of affairs on the frontier and were each reinforcing the other's inclination to deal forcefully with the uprising.

June 28, 1763: Jeffery Amherst made the following entry into his journal: "Major Monckton sailed for England in the Edward Merchant vessel. I wrote by him to Lord Egremont to acquaint him of the mischief the Indians were doing, and that I should try to put a stop to it as soon as possible and with as little loss as may be of His Majesty's subjects."<sup>45</sup> Again, no mention is made of smallpox, but this remark foreshadowed Amherst's inclination to deal with the Indians in a manner that would avoid English bloodshed.

June 29, 1763: Amherst replied to the June 25 letter of Colonel Bouquet, "Last night I received your letter of the twenty-fifth, the contents of which please me very much, your sentiments agreeing

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<sup>44</sup> Parkman, vol. 2, 646; Waddell, 225.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffery Amherst, *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst* (Amherst College special collection: Amherst, Massachusetts), 309-310.



exactly with my own regarding the treatment the savages deserve from us. A proper spirit exerted now may be the happy means of preserving the lives of his majesty's subjects hereafter: I only need add that I wish to hear of no prisoners, should any of the villains be met with arms."<sup>46</sup> An endorsement on the letter reveals it was received by Bouquet on July 6. It is apparent that Amherst was willing to wage war vigorously and that he believed that an immediate vigorous prosecution of the war would ultimately save English lives. Amherst's here-expressed desire to preserve English lives is consonant with the sentiment in his June 28<sup>th</sup> journal entry.

July 1, 1763: Bouquet wrote to governor James Hamilton and expressed concern regarding the vulnerability of the Pennsylvania frontier. "I now beg Leave to lay before you the defenceless State of this County, and the Plan I would propose for its Protection against the Attacks it stands exposed to. The Inhabitants, in their present Position, are utterly unable to defend their scattered Plantations, and should they be so lucky as to reap their Harvest, they have no Means to save it from the Flames. Generally destitute of Arms, Ammunition & Provisions their Spirits are cast down at the dismal Prospect of impending Ruin; and it is more than probable that they will desert the County on the first Attack, which would be fatal to the Province; as so many Families crowding on the Rest would spread a general Panick and Confusion, and occasion a Scarcity of Provisions....It is impossible to save the whole of this extensive County; several parts of it must be abandoned, which becoming a Prey to the Savages would enable them to continue the Depradations by Means of the Provisions they would get on the deserted Plantations." Bouquet then proposed to the governor a network of stockades that would provide some safety from the impending Indian attacks. From this excerpt it is clear that Bouquet believed the Pennsylvania countryside was in a serious state of emergency; very possibly, this perception of impending destruction explains Bouquet's coming approval of new tactical methods.

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<sup>46</sup> Waddell, "Amherst to Bouquet, June 29, 1763," 277, emphasis in original.

July 3, 1763: Bouquet wrote to Amherst from Carlisle, before having received his letter of June 29. He forwarded a copy of Ecuyer's letter and McKee's report. He also told of the loss of Forts Presq' Isle, Le Boeuf, and Venango, and related intelligence on the Indian's treachery in taking the posts. Mention is also made that the Indians killed several traders in the Detroit area, hanged the wife of a trader, and carried away her children.<sup>47</sup> When Amherst received this letter on July 7<sup>th</sup>, Amherst must have been extremely alarmed and at the rapidly deteriorating state of his frontier command. It is also reasonable to assume that the hanging of a woman and the kidnapping of children were acts that would have struck Amherst -- and many British military officers -- as inappropriate, unprofessional, and uncivilized.

July 7, 1763: Amherst wrote in response to Bouquet's letter of July 3. He expressed his "great concern" at the loss of the British forts and detailed his response to the recent defeats. He added that "A Fixed Resolution should be taken by Every Commanding Officer, whose Post is Attacked by Savages, Never to Trust to their Promises, but to Defend his Post to the last Extremity to Take Every Life away that they can: We have so many Recent Instances of their Breach of Faith, in this Particular, that I am Surprized any Officer in his Senses, would Enter into Terms with such Barbarians." What appears to be a postscript is an undated paper adding "Could it not be contrived to send the small pox among the disaffected tribes of Indians? We must on this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them."<sup>48</sup> The postscript is initialed "J. A."<sup>49</sup> Thus

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<sup>47</sup> Waddell, "Price to Bouquet, June 26, 1763," 266-267; "Bouquet to J. Amherst, July 3, 1763," 288-289. Enclosed in Bouquet's letter to Amherst on July 3, 1763 was Price's June 26 letter to Bouquet. Also enclosed in Bouquet's letter from Bouquet to Amherst were letters from Presque Isle and Venango, but these enclosures have not been found (Waddell, 289).

<sup>48</sup> Waddell, "J. Amherst to Bouquet, July 7, 1763," 299-301.

<sup>49</sup> Both the letter of July 7 and the undated document suggesting infection of the Indians are apparently in the handwriting of the same amanuensis. It is written on the inside of the envelope folio. The July 7 letter is signed by Amherst; the 'J. A.' signed on the undated document is "apparently though not certainly in Amherst's hand." Knollenberg, 492; See also Waddell, 301.

it appears that in his increasing alarm and desperation, and in frustration with the deceptiveness that characterized the Indian manner of taking forts, Amherst became willing to contemplate using smallpox as a tactical weapon.<sup>50</sup>

July 11, 1763: John Hughes, then at Lancaster, wrote to Bouquet at Carlisle suggesting the use of dogs and scouting parties to hunt enemy Indians. Hughes argued that the English would be wise to use dogs to flush the Indians out from their concealed ambushes in forests and force them to engage the English in open combat. Excerpts from John Hughes's letter to Bouquet read as follows: "Sir, as I have no Motives for these Lines but ye Desire of preserving His Majesties Colony, the Lives of his Subjects on the frontier, And ye officers and Soldiers Under Your Command, I flatter myself I shall be pardoned by you Supposing the following Hints not to be Approved off. As the Enemy you are to Encounter is a Cruel, Suptil, Ambushcading Enemy from whom no fair Engagements, nor any Quarters can be Expected If they get the Better by any Means, .... the following Method will not only help to keep you from Ambushcades by at ye same time add to your Numbers." Hughes then outlined methods in which British soldiers might use hunting dogs to flush Indian war parties from their ambushes and to then pursue them. In closing, Hughes averred "I cou<sup>d</sup> almost venter my Life that 500 men with 500 Dogs wou<sup>d</sup> be much more Dredfull to 2000 Indians than an Army of Some

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<sup>50</sup> Pontiac had attempted to take Fort Detroit in the following manner. Pontiac and his Indian warriors strapped guns, tomahawks, war clubs, and knives to their persons and then draped themselves in blankets. They next appeared at the gates of the fort, hoping for a council with the commander, Major Gladwyn, *inside* the fort's stockade. Once admitted to the fort, Pontiac's warriors had intended to fall upon the unsuspecting British soldiers, slaughtering them and gaining the fort. However, Major Gladwyn was informed of this scheme the night before it was enacted. The warriors entered the fort as planned, but Gladwyn had stationed his soldiers around the perimeter of the fort, armed and ready for action. Pontiac and his men, seeing their surprise ruined, left the stockade. Amherst had received an account of this event from Major Gladwyn, and was thus duly aware of the deception inherent in this forest war. (See J. Clarence Webster, ed., *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst: Recording the Military Career of General Amherst in America from 1758 to 1763* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), June 21<sup>st</sup> entry, 308.)

thousands of brave men in the Regular way.”<sup>51</sup> Echoing Bouquet’s thoughts Francis Parkman wrote, “Probably there is no man who ever had occasion to fight Indians in the woods who would object to a dog as an ally.”<sup>52</sup> An endorsement on the letter vouches that it was answered on July 14. It may well have reached Bouquet by July 13. Any reply that Bouquet may have made to Hughes has not been found.

July 13, 1763: Bouquet responded to Amherst’s July 7 letter. In a postscript he added “I will try to inoculate the -- with Some Blankets that may fall in their Hands, and take care not to get the disease myself. As it is a pity to expose good men against them I wish we would make use of the Spanish Method to hunt them with English Dogs, supported by Rangers and Some Light Horse, who would I think effectually extirpate or remove that vermin.”<sup>53</sup> In this postscript, Bouquet expressed willingness to comply with Amherst’s suggestion to infect the Indians with smallpox.

July 16, 1763: Amherst acknowledged his receipt of Bouquet’s July 13 letter. In the body of the letter nothing was mentioned of hunting the Indians with dogs or infecting them. There is, however, an undated paper in the Bouquet collection that is apparently Amherst’s reply to Bouquet’s letter of July 13. “You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of Blankets, as well as to Try Every other Method that can serve to Extirpate the Execrable Race. I should be very glad your Scheme for Hunting them down by Dogs could take Effect; but England is at too great a Distance to think of that at present.” Both the July 16 letter and the undated document is in the hand of Amherst’s secretary. The letter is signed

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<sup>51</sup> Waddell, “Hughes to Bouquet, July 11, 1763,” 304-305.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Parkman, 648-649.

<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the letter in which Bouquet responded to Amherst has been lost. It does not appear in the Waddell’s *Papers of Henry Bouquet*. Knollenberg states that he has not seen Bouquet’s July 13<sup>th</sup> missive nor its postscript. One can only imagine that this letter would clarify much about the relationship between Bouquet and Amherst and their approach to defeating the Indians.

“Jeff: Amherst” in Amherst’s handwriting, “J. A.” is the signature on the undated document, and it is “apparently but not certainly in Amherst’s hand.”<sup>54</sup>

July 19, 1763: Bouquet responded to Amherst’s letter of July 16. He told General Amherst that “all your Directions will be observed.”

July 26, 1763: Bouquet and Ecuyer corresponded on a variety of military matters but discussed nothing of their involvement in germ warfare.

August 10, 1763: Bouquet reached Fort Pitt.

August 11 to December 1, 1763: The correspondence between Amherst in New York and Bouquet in Philadelphia bespoke no evidence of trying to infect the Indians. No further indications are found until April of 1764.

April 14, 1764: A servant of an Indian trader, Gershom Hicks, who had been captured by the Shawnees in May of 1763 and quickly turned over to the Delawares made an interesting assertion. Gershom Hicks made a deposition to Ecuyer’s successor at Fort Pitt, Captain William Grant. Part of the deposition reads as follows: “Hicks says he thinks that with the Delawares and Shawneese he has seen about 50 or 60 white Prisoners most of which are women & young persons and most of them taken last war; that the Small pox has been very general & raging among the Indians since last spring and that 30 or 40 Mingoes [Ohio River Iroquois], as many Delawares and some Shawnese Died, all of the

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<sup>54</sup> Knollenberg, 493. Parkman, in a footnote in *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (649) writes “The postscript seems to belong to a letter written on the first leaf of the foolscap sheet, which is lost or destroyed.” Waddell notes that “So much controversy has arisen over the content of this message that it should be noted that Bouquet’s endorsements on two letters of Amherst to him dated July 16 implied that there was an earlier July 16 letter. Could this have been the substance of that missing letter?” (Waddell, 315). Thus, based on Parkman’s and Waddell’s comments, it is possible that the missing July 16 letter from Amherst to Bouquet contained more detailed writings on the plan to spread smallpox among the Indians.

Small pox since that time; that it still continues amongst them." One would assume that "last" spring meant spring of 1763. If "last spring" were indeed the spring of 1763, it would mean that the Indians had contracted the contagion before the Fort Pitt parlay and before Amherst ever had the idea of using smallpox as a weapon.

April 19, 1764: Gershom Hicks offered a new deposition to Captain William Grant that varied from his April 14<sup>th</sup> statement but mentioned nothing of smallpox.

September 10, 1764: A letter was written to Bouquet from the Virginia frontier by Colonel Andrew Lewis, stating that he had "certain Intiligance" from the Shawnees and Delawares. "The poor Rascals are Dieing very fast with the small pox; they can make but Lettle Resistance and when Routed from their settlement must parish in great Numbers by the Disorders."

In response to Knollenberg's article, Donald H. Kent contributed a very critical shred of evidence from *The Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet* that Knollenberg had missed.<sup>55</sup> The bill appears in an account of Levy, Trent, and Company against the Crown for June of 1763:

To Sundries got to Replace in kind those which were taken from people in the Hospital to Convey the Small-pox to the Indians Viz<sup>t</sup>.

2 Blankets	at 20/	£2	0	0
1 Silk Handkerchief	10/			
& 1 linnen do:	3/6	0	13	6

Thus, the Levy, Trent, and Company billed the Crown for 2 blankets, a silk handkerchief, and one linen and explicitly stated in the bill that enumerated items were taken from the fort's hospital and given to the Indians for the purpose of transmitting the disease to the Indians.

<sup>55</sup> Donald Kent, "Communications," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 41 (March 1955), 762-763.

On August 13, 1763, this bill was certified by Captain Ecuyer—thus implying that no later than the date indicated he knew that the blankets proffered to the parleying Indians had come from the smallpox hospital. It was then corrected by Captain Ourry on May 22, 1764 and at last endorsed by General Thomas Gage with the following comment:

The Within Acc<sup>l</sup>. not belonging to any particular Department, but the Articles ordered for the use of the Service, by the off. Comm<sup>dg</sup>, Col. Bouquet will order the Acc<sup>l</sup>. to be discharged & place it in his Acct. of extraordinaries.

Donald Kent's contribution is significant because it proves that the distribution of the infected blankets was officially countenanced by the British government. Kent pointed out that his document "makes it evident not only that the attempt was made to infect the Indians but that it was an official action."<sup>56</sup> However, it can be argued that a more apt interpretation is to say that payment by the British government made the distribution of blankets "an official action in retrospect." The British military eventually picked up the tab, but the correspondence above indicates that the blankets were given at the behest of neither Amherst nor Bouquet — nor any other British representative with a rank higher than captain. The bill from Trent's company indicates that some of the men in the fort — probably Ecuyer included — knowingly procured the blankets from the hospital for the express purpose of infecting the Indians. That the British Crown paid for it gives official sanction to a *fait accompli*.

Because the blankets were presumably taken directly out of the smallpox hospital and given immediately to the Indians, it is possible that some infected "droplets or dust" were in or on the blankets. The whole practice of inoculation is based upon the fact that the virus can be communicated from scabs,<sup>57</sup> and there certainly may have been scabs in the blankets. Molluscum is another virus of the Poxvirus family and its

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<sup>56</sup> Kent, 762-763. Italics mine.

<sup>57</sup> Crosby, 46. Crosby also notes that the virus remains active in the scabs for a period of several weeks.

spread has traditionally been associated with physical contact sports and the sharing of wet towels,<sup>58</sup> and it is therefore easily imaginable that smallpox would be as well. It is known, however, that smallpox cannot be spread by an animal carrier, and therefore that method of transmission does not need to be considered. If either of the Indians who met with Ecuyer did acquire the affliction, it may not have been from the blankets but from one of the English representatives at the parley; it would be interesting to know if any of the British representatives contracted smallpox that summer. At any rate, this particular epidemic raged among the Delaware Indians, and many of the once familiar chiefs such as Shingas ceased to appear in any more written accounts.<sup>59</sup> It is equally important to realize that one cannot hold Gershom Hicks to the exact meaning of the word "spring" in his statement to Captain William Grant, for surely he could not have known that centuries later his words would be under such scrutiny. It is not unlikely that his recollection of season was merely an approximation, and the epidemic that he observed did arise due to the Fort Pitt incident. Thus, there was clearly a smallpox epidemic in the general Fort Pitt area at some point during the year of 1763. Contaminated blankets *were* distributed at the Fort Pitt parley. It is possible, though not certain, that Indians contracted the disease at the fort.

Yet, there is no evidence as to whether or not Amherst's directives to Bouquet were ever carried out. Indeed, Amherst and Bouquet conspired to infect their enemies, but it is possible that their machinations were never put into effect. However, because the blankets were distributed before Amherst's suggestion and because M. de Loungueuil was aware of the concept eleven years prior, the question is raised as to how acceptable and how widespread biological warfare was on the world stage and on the American frontier.

It is patent that germ warfare is not at all new to mankind -- two thousand years ago the Greeks and the Romans would poison drinking water with human and animal corpses, and similar tactics were used during the American Civil War and the Boer War. The technique of catapulting bodies of plague victims over the walls of a fortress has been

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<sup>58</sup> Baron, 88.

<sup>59</sup> Jennings, 447-448.



used sporadically throughout history. The Tartars used such a method against the Genoese in Crimea in 1346 and the fleeing Genoese tragically spread the black plague from Asia to Europe. A similar tactic was used four hundred years later in the Russo-Swedish war of 1710.<sup>60</sup> Even the Indians themselves were guilty of participating in what might anachronistically be termed “biological warfare.” During Spain’s sixteenth century conquest of the New World, the Indians supposedly became so incensed by the invulnerability of the Spaniards to epidemic disease that they kneaded infected blood into their masters’ bread and secreted infected corpses in Spanish drinking wells.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the Iroquois reportedly used animal carcasses to pollute the drinking water for British troops.<sup>62</sup> In fact, in the early 1660s Jesuit missionaries in New France reported – probably hyperbolically or inaccurately – that an unnamed group of Indians who lived just south of the Iroquois used snake poison against their tribal enemies.

The people are not so inoffensive as the snakes, for they make use of a poison with which they understand perfectly the art of infecting springs, and even whole rivers; and they do it with such skill that the water loses nothing of its fair appearance, although it be tainted throughout.<sup>63</sup>

Another important question to address is why Amherst felt compelled to resort to germ warfare. One answer is to focus on Amherst’s postscripts and undated letter to Bouquet and on the

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<sup>60</sup> Sean Murphy, A. Hay, and S. Rose, *No Fire, No Thunder* (Pluto Press Limited, London, 1984), 27.

<sup>61</sup> Crosby, 38.

<sup>62</sup> Jennings, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Hierosme Lalemant, “Relation of what occurred in the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in the country of New France, from the Summer of the year 1661 to the Summer of the year 1662,” in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 145-149.

contemptuous epithets that Amherst frequently applied to his foe. For example, Amherst's undated letter used words that strike turn-of-the-millennium Americans as deeply malevolent. Amherst wanted to "extirpate" the "execrable race" of Indians, and wished to attempt "hunting them down by dogs." The term "extirpate" may invoke notions of genocide, "execrable race" perhaps imputes to Amherst a virulent racism, and "hunting them down by dogs" not only seems inordinately cruel, but suggests that to the English, the Indians were closer to animals than humans.

However, the quest for historical understanding demands that the analysis be carried further. A complete and truthful understanding of Amherst's motives is forever lost to modern investigators. The passage of time and the limits of the written record have rendered full comprehension unobtainable. In spite of these difficulties, an attempt can be made to better understand why Amherst may have instructed Henry Bouquet to engage in germ warfare.

First of all, one must understand the precarious situation of the British frontier command. "Pontiac's Rebellion," as it is often called, was stunningly successful in its early stages. Several British forts had been sacked by the Indians. Forts Michilimackinac, Sandusky, St. Joseph, Miami, Venango, Le Boeuf, and Presq' Isle all fallen to the Indian coalition, and Forts Detroit and Pitt were under siege. Although the British were not likely in danger of being driven from the continent, their situation was grave indeed. Amherst was aware of this and repeatedly expressed a desire to put an end to the conflict with as little loss as possible to His Majesty's subjects. Thus, when attempting to understand Amherst's actions it is important to consider the precariousness of the English position and Amherst's desire to end the conflict in a way that minimized British losses.

A similar argument can be made for those at Fort Pitt -- the ones who actually distributed the infected blankets. Bouquet's July 1st letter to Governor Hamilton predicted widespread Indian depredations against the civilian Pennsylvania frontier, and a June 26<sup>th</sup> letter from Ecuier to Bouquet stated that there were 338 men, 104 women, and 106 children who had taken refuge in Fort Pitt.<sup>64</sup> This latter missive was written two days after the blankets had been distributed at the fort. Warfare with the

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<sup>64</sup> Waddell, "Ecuier to Bouquet," June 26, 1763, 259-260.

Indians had proven to be a bloody and chaotic affair, and Ecuyer's suspicion of the Indians, a realization of his precarious position, and a belief that he was obliged to do everything possible to protect his garrison and the colonists under his guardianship may have coalesced to prompt Ecuyer – or someone at Fort Pitt – to attempt to infect the Indians with smallpox.

More important perhaps is the need to understand that Amherst was engaged in a type of war that was very different from that which experience and his training had prepared him. Simply put, Amherst believed himself to be a “civilized” military officer fighting a “savage” foe. For Amherst and for many European military officers, war had its own rules and ethics. The two main sources for European military ethics were Hugo Grotius's *De jure belli ac pacis*, first published in 1625, and Emmeric de Vattel's 1758 work, *The Law of Nations*. These treatises argued for the protection of women, children, elderly, and infirm and discussed when soldiers should be given quarter. It also argued against the poisoning of wells and springs. It is probable that these authors would have included harmful pathogens along with the general poisons they condemned had they thoroughly understood the difference between the two.<sup>65</sup> Thus, one can argue that Amherst's directive to spread smallpox among the Indians was a deviation from the rules of “civilized” warfare. That Amherst himself probably believed so is indicated by the secretive manner in which he discussed with Bouquet the tactical use of smallpox.

However, to the British, their Indian adversaries were not fighting by the rules of “civilized” warfare. The above-noted correspondence details that a trader's wife was hanged and that her children were carried away. This execution of a woman was a deviation from British military ethics; the various incidences of scalping, ambushes, and deception that the British command experienced at the hands of the Indians may have struck Amherst as violating of the “rules” of war.<sup>66</sup> Thus, one might surmise that Amherst might not have felt bound to follow the rules of

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth A. Fenn, “Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffery Amherst,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 4, 1573-1574.

<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that during Pontiac's uprising the British made another adaptations to forest warfare with the Indians by dressing British soldiers as Indians and using them for reconnaissance. (Waddell, “Bouquet to Campbell,” 273.)

war in his engagements with the Indians. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, European military ethics argued that civilized war rules did not apply to savages or infidels; to Amherst, the Indians were savages who themselves did not recognize the rules of civilized war.<sup>67</sup> Amherst never expressed a desire to engage in biological warfare against the French in his campaigns on the St. Lawrence. Perhaps this was simply because he was never faced such a colossal defeat as he did against the Indians in 1763; or instead it may have been because he viewed the French army as an altogether different sort of adversary than the Indians — the French were a “civilized” enemy whereas the Indians were a “savage” enemy.

The written record provides a vivid picture of the events that occurred at Fort Pitt in the year 1763, but much detail has been left unrendered. It is known that infected blankets were given to the Indians at the fort, though not by order of General Amherst. It is also known that Amherst requested such an action two weeks later, but it is not certain that his commands were ever acted upon. The novelty of Sir Jeffery’s ambitions can be flatly discounted, for history has witnessed many previous engagements in germ warfare. Much sensationalism accompanies this case, but a strong argument can be submitted that the Amherst incident is unique only because it was well-documented, though not documented well enough to answer some of the most intriguing questions. Additionally, this case is sensational because it lends itself well to an oft-controversial reconsideration of American history that has been ongoing since the 1960s.

The accusations against Jeffery Amherst have received much attention during the final third of the twentieth century, and it appears that the controversy is not about to subside. The town of Amherst, Massachusetts is named after General Amherst, and Amherst College, located in Amherst, Massachusetts, has chosen “Lord Jeff” as its mascot. Some of Amherst’s citizens are uncomfortable being associated with the questionable and disreputable intentions of Jeffery Amherst and thus have sought to change the name of the town to something less controversial.

In 1759 the community which was then known as the third precinct of Hadley chose for its name “Amherst” in honor of the commander-in-

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<sup>67</sup> Fenn, 1573-1574.

chief of British forces in America who had so recently defeated the French at their Louisbourg stronghold on the St. Lawrence River. Amherst was an esteemed British war hero during the French and Indian War. Amherst College was founded in 1821, and it was named not for General Amherst but rather for the town of Amherst, whose citizens turned out in great numbers to help erect the first campus building. It took another eight decades for "Lord Jeff" to become a college symbol. In 1903 an undergraduate, James S. Hamilton, wrote the lyrics and music to the "Lord Jeffery Amherst," a song which satirized other alma mater songs. "Lord Jeff" caught on as a mascot during the college's centennial celebration in 1921 and during the colonial revival period of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>68</sup> This embrace of "Lord Jeff" was intensified by the particularly close relationship between Great Britain and the United States between the two world wars.

From the 1920s through the early 1960s, there was little controversy surrounding the name of the town or the college. However, the social upheavals of the sixties and seventies caused many Americans to repudiate what some scholars have called the "heroic national tradition" -- a very celebratory reading of American history -- and construct a new, critical, and more nuanced national history. The recent debate concerning whether or not to allow Amherst's name to continue to represent the town and the college is part of this critical process and of reckoning with the legacy of colonialism and the dispossession of native peoples.

In the first year of the new millennium the appropriateness of the town's name is still contested. One editorialist likened Jeffery Amherst to Saddam Hussein and argued that "both men are racist scoundrels, unprincipled warriors who have or have sought to ignobly eradicate non-combatant enemy populations through nefarious means."<sup>69</sup> In defense of town's name, one Amherst resident believes that the name Amherst is a "melody" that evokes images of "turning seasons, education, and the poets Dickinson, Frost, and Francis, of circling hills, orchards, the Town

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<sup>68</sup> "The Halo and the Cloud," Douglas C. Wilson, Editor, *Amherst*, vol. 50, no. 1, Fall 1997, 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> John Furbish, "Amherst's name honors dishonorable actions," Letters to the Editor, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, April 7, 2000, A8.

Common, books, and basketball.”<sup>70</sup> Another writer, satirizing the critics, suggested that if the town has to be named something that is “totally inoffensive” the town might rename itself “Bob.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, with such divergent and strident opinions, the controversy is not likely to disappear any time soon.

It seems that an educated jury would acquit Amherst of the charge of infecting the Indians with smallpox for there is considerable doubt permeating the allegations. However, there is no doubt at all as to Amherst’s intent to unleash contagion among his Indian enemies, and there is no doubting Amherst’s visceral disdain for his foe. Perhaps the eminent nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman said it best, “his just indignation at the atrocities which had caused so much misery is his best apology.”<sup>72</sup>

One might argue that in war -- especially a total war or a war with no rules -- one must fight to win. However, because the smallpox episode of 1763 is still controversial over two hundred years later it is clear that learned and literate societies will scrutinize not only the outcome of wars, but how those wars were fought.

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<sup>70</sup> Douglas C. Wilson, “‘Amherst’ does not evoke image of evil deeds,” Letters to the Editor, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, March 18, 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Robert H. Romer, “A ‘totally inoffensive’ name for Amherst,” Letters to the Editor, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, March 18, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Parkman, 650.