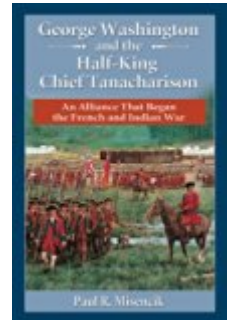


Paul R. Misencik. *George Washington and the Half-King Chief Tanacharison: An Alliance that Began the French and Indian War.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014. 212 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-7950-4.



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Paul R. Misencik promises many things in his preface, including analysis of the relationship between George Washington and Seneca half-king Tanacharison and the impact of that relationship on the start of the French and Indian War. Additionally, he intends to depict the relationships between the French, the English, and the several Native American nations (and their factions), and the ways those relations affected the coming of war. A tall order, especially in fewer than two hundred pages.

Misencik is at his best describing the intricate and often conflicting motives of the colonial governments, colonial business interests, the British government, the French, the Iroquois Grand Council, Delawares, Senecas, Shawnees, and others who were living in or hoped to live in the Ohio territory. Within any, if not all, of these groups there were internal conflicts of interest that further complicated decision making and interactions among them. For a brief span, some two-thirds of the way through the book, Misencik does an excellent job sorting out the impact of these

myriad complications in a way that is clear without oversimplification. Unfortunately, it takes that long for him to stop providing jumbled, overly detailed back story heavily populated with random names of politicians, Native American leaders, traders, and military figures on all sides, usually accompanied by every known detail of their lives.

One nice feature is that there are eight maps and battle diagrams; unfortunately, they are not always the ones that might be useful to readers who do not have current and eighteenth-century maps handy for reference. Misencik overwhelms us with historical place names, often with additional information about what different groups of people called particular places and how those names changed over time. He sometimes provides nearby modern place names as references—but never provides a map displaying most of the places, let alone one showing both historical and modern places. It is, however, nice to see a book in which geography plays such a central role in events include as many maps as this one does.

Misencik's desire to analyze the relationship between George Washington and Tanacharison and its impact on the start of the French and Indian War is reasonable, but the execution has weaknesses with regard to content and methodology. One is that Misencik often contradicts himself; for example, he tells us that Washington and his officers "studied the document [the Articles of Capitulation offered to Washington by Captain Sieur Louis Coulon de Villiers at Great Meadows, July 3, 1754] throughout the night" (p. 145). Yet only two pages later, while discussing Washington's attempts to justify the loss at Great Meadows and his signature on what amounted to a confession of murder, Misencik says, "Washington ... may not have devoted the attention to the document that it deserved" (p. 147). This is one example, but the problem occurs several times.

Another problem in the same vein is Misencik's apparent conclusion that Tanacharison started the war. He does not say so outright, but throughout the book credits Tanacharison with manipulating Washington, or events: "He had worked hard to force a fight between England and France ..." (p. 130) (despite frequently describing Tanacharison's annoyance that Washington refused to follow his advice). Considering how well Misencik untangles the complexities of motives and relations that led to the events of 1754, it is surprising how often he implies that the whole start-up of the war was Tanacharison's doing.

It might be possible to dismiss some of these weaknesses, but from a methodological viewpoint, the final one is the most significant. Misencik may be writing for a popular audience rather than a scholarly one because there is a noticeable shortage of citations in this book. Many of the citations are discursive, which can be helpful, but they often lack any source references for the sections of text covered. There are direct quotations for which there are no citations (for example, p. 123). Since Misencik claims to be explaining what Tanacharison, and other Native leaders, thought

and felt, sources and citations for material so notoriously tricky to tease out are particularly important. Further, some of the sources are rather problematic. In at least one instance, Misencik attributes reasoning and motive to Tanacharison by citing a book that is essentially a nineteenth-century antiquarian secondary work rather than a primary source (p. 110 and p. 185n29). Given the centrality of Tanacharison's motives to Misencik's entire work, a stronger pool of sources would have provided firmer underpinning than this one does. If Misencik offered this project as a synthesis, such source weaknesses would not be problematic, but his contention is that this book provides a new interpretation of the relationship between Washington and Tanacharison. Documents written by Washington, of which Misencik makes excellent use, should not also be the only primary source material about Tanacharison. In short, Misencik offers some nuggets of interesting analysis and flashes of clarity into a complex situation and time, but this book also has grave weaknesses.

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