

CIVILIZED WARFARE

American Plains Indians, known as great warriors, practiced one of the most civilized methods of assessing bravery in battle. Instead of killing an enemy, they merely touched or hit him. The ritual of recording these usually bloodless victories was called “counting coup”.

Warriors of some tribes carried into battle a pole called a Coup Stick (from the French word Coup, meaning a “blow”). It was bound with skins or fur and decorated with feathers. If the warrior was able to touch an enemy with it, he gained credits.

The “savage” Indians designed elaborate point systems to keep track of their triumphs. The highest number of points usually went to the first person in a battle who touched an enemy. A warrior who killed an enemy usually received the fewest points! In some tribes, a warrior who saved his friend’s life in battle could paint a cross on his clothing (the cross was non-Christian, but denoted the four directions of the wind). A black feather torn down the middle was sometimes given to the man who initially sighted the enemy.

Indians often recited their coups out loud. Each time he earned a new coup, a warrior was entitled to recite his complete coup history. Bragging was accepted, but not lying or excessive exaggeration!

Francisco LOPEZ
ASM, BSA Troop 567
Fontana