



Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution

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On July 9, 1755, British and colonial troops under the command of General Edward Braddock suffered a crushing defeat to French and Native American enemy forces in Ohio Country. Known as the Battle of the Monongahela, the loss altered the trajectory of the Seven Years' War in America, escalating the fighting and shifting the balance of power. An unprecedented rout of a modern and powerful British army by a predominantly Indian force, Monongahela shocked the colonial world--and also planted the first seeds of an independent American consciousness.

The culmination of a failed attempt to capture Fort Duquesne from the French, Braddock's Defeat was a pivotal moment in American and world history. While the defeat is often blamed on blundering and arrogance on the part of General Braddock--who was wounded in battle and died the next day--David Preston's gripping new work argues that such a claim diminishes the victory that Indian and French forces won by their superior discipline and leadership. In fact, the French Canadian officer Captain Beaujeu had greater tactical skill, reconnaissance, and execution, and his Indian allies were the most effective and disciplined troops on the field.

Preston also explores the long shadow cast by Braddock's Defeat over the 18th century and the American Revolution two decades later. The campaign had been an awakening to empire for many British Americans, spawning ideas of American identity and anticipating many of the political and social divisions that would erupt with the outbreak of the Revolution. Braddock's Defeat was the defining generational experience for many British and American officers, including Thomas Gage, Horatio Gates, and perhaps most significantly, George Washington.

A rich battle history driven by a gripping narrative and an abundance of new evidence, Braddock's Defeat presents the fullest account yet of this defining moment in early American history.

Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution Details

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From Reader Review Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution for online ebook

Vince Ciaramella says

The Braddock expedition and the Battle of the Monongahela are two of my favorite topics that I have been researching since I was a kid. I think I may have read almost every book out there dealing with the doomed army's march and I still have all of them plus a collection of books printed in small runs by sites along the road that you cannot buy off of Amazon. So this book was a must.

What I really liked about this book is that Preston dispels the myth that Braddock was some tyrant on horseback that mistreated everyone, including his Native American allies. The primary sources do not indicate this yet the myth persists. Why? I think it has something to do with the fact that Braddock insisted on fighting the battle in the European fashion which gives the impression that he was rigid and wouldn't listen. To some degree this is true but really he was out of his element. I doubt any one who was a veteran of European combat could have done a better job. Natives hiding behind trees was as far as you can get from Flanders or any of the other battlefields Braddock had seen or participated in. He was just an old dog who really didn't take to the new tricks.

Another thing that really stuck out to me was the authors postulation that if Braddock would have landed in Pennsylvania and came across the state instead of the Virginia route that he would have been better supplied and the march would have been easier. I can see the logic behind this argument but I guess we'll never know. What if Braddock attacked in September when the French were down on supplies? What if Braddock attacked two weeks earlier? Fun questions but ones we'll never answer.

As far as all the books go about Braddock this is my 2nd favorite behind Braddock at the Monongahela. That was is just a classic in the field. I will re-read this book again in the future. There was so much detail I feel it needs a second read through to absorb it all.

Eric says

This was an excellent book, filled with well researched, well thought out, and well written analysis & conclusions about one of the seminal battles in American history. This is the way modern history should be done.

Mike Staresinic says

In this reassessment of Braddock's Expedition, Preston asks the questions that come to mind in reading staid histories of the expedition and its rapid demise above the banks of the Monongahela in 1755. Original documents unearthed by Preston show the French plan of attack - in a 3-party battle, American authors had not located French battle plans, first-hand accounts recorded within months, and an American Indian participant's account. Preston reveals that Indian leaders long believed to be at the battle - assumptions based on little more than political analysis, which still lacks among historians, on the excellence of the Indian attack - were not present. French military leaders credited the Indians, mainly French allies from the Great Lakes region, with incredible battle discipline, something overlooked until now.

Bryn Dunham says

Excellent history of one of the first battles of the French and Indian War. Vivid descriptions of the monumental logistical challenges of marching men and materiel through the densely forested mountains of VA, MD, and PA; the contrasting of the tactics and composition of the rival forces; the consequences of the battle and its legacy. This is really a great book about 18th century warfare and life on the first frontier in America.

Jerome says

A clear, sweeping and well-written history of the Braddock campaign, with an emphasis on the difference in tactics between the British regulars and the French, Canadian, and Indian forces. Preston does a fine job placing the campaign into its context and brings all of the players to life. He concludes that "the battle was not lost by one man's arrogance or bluster," and that in terms of the battles' context and factors, Braddock was "simply unfortunate."

Along with the actual campaign, Preston covers the motives of France's Indian allies, and why the Indians allied with the British weren't particularly eager to aid Braddock's campaign. Many of the natives suspected that both the British and the French would discard or even eliminate their Indian allies once one side defeated the other, and Preston shows how this suspicion affected the war in general and the campaign in particular.

Most of the book deals with the actual march and the various difficulties encountered in traversing the terrain, and explores how the fatigue of the march may have affected the soldiers' performance when they actually came to battle. Preston also points out that, when the enemy attacked them at the Monongahela, these men were able to stand and fight for three hours against a practically invisible enemy. These soldiers did not display panic, indiscipline, or incompetence as we understand it today.

Although older books and popular mythology have tended to portray Braddock's march as an inflexible, hidebound "European" affair doomed to failure, historians have challenged this caricature over the years, and Preston does the same. He also concludes that the march was actually quite a success in terms of logistics. Many accounts also fault Braddock for arrogance and blundering; Preston notes that this robs the entire story of contingency, and he highlights several events that he argues were just as pivotal, such as the decision to send British regulars to North America, the Alexandria Congress, French logistics troubles, Indian diplomacy, intelligence failures, and Braddock's actual success in constructing a road that quickened the march to his objective.

An excellent, well-researched history.

Doug Gordon says

When I first saw that this was written by a history professor, I was concerned that it would be too "academic" and make for dense reading with a lot of superfluous details. But I was wrong about that. It certainly is greatly detailed, and at times I got lost with the profusion of unfamiliar names, but the narrative flowed very

well and held my interest all the way through.

I had a particular interest in this story since I have traveled in that area of Pennsylvania a couple of times and stopped by Fort Necessity, Braddock's monument, and the existing trace of the road. I was familiar with the basic story, but this book filled in many of the details, and I particularly got a lot out of learning about what the French were doing and seeing how it played out from their point of view. Reading this book also let me see how the attitude of the British leaders to the American "provincials" and the outcome of this campaign led right into the buildup to the Revolution of 20 years later. I also learned a number of impressive things about George Washington that I had been unaware of.

Overall, this is the best straightforward book of history that I have read for a while.

Chris says

This is an account of General Edward Braddock's disastrous 1755 expedition to attempt the capture of Fort Duquesne from the French at the forks of the Ohio River in present day Pittsburgh, PA. The author first goes into the background of how the British, French, and Native Americans came into conflict in the Ohio territory. He explains how the French and Indian War began and the subsequent planning for the Braddock Expedition. It is a detailed work on the expedition and battle and includes analysis on the impact of the devastating defeat suffered by the British. This book is part of the *Pivotal Moments in American History* collection which comprises works by various authors on crucial events in history. I would recommend this one for anyone interested in learning about the French and Indian War.

Charles Inglin says

An excellent account of General Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne (modern Pittsburgh), his defeat, and the larger ramification for the history of North America. In the wake of the disastrous Battle of the Monongahela Braddock's reputation was savaged. The General Braddock the author portrays was in fact an able and competent commander and administrator faced with daunting problems. Before he could attack the French at the forks of the Ohio he had to get his army, at the time the largest the British had mounted in North America, from tidewater Virginia across the Appalachians, a task made much more difficult by the inability of the colonial governments to provide sufficient transport and supplies. That he succeeded in building a road through the wilderness almost to Fort Duquesne is a testimony to his ability.

Braddock was also pilloried as an incompetent soldier. The author shows that the conduct of the march over the Appalachians was well organized tactically and that Braddock was very cognizant of the security of his columns. The only serious encounter with the French and Indians by his advanced guard was easily countered. But then Braddock fell victim to circumstances, not all of which can be laid at his feet. Had he arrived earlier, he would have easily overwhelmed the French, or more likely have found the fort abandoned. Instead, the French garrison was reinforced by French-Canadian marines and militia, with extensive experience fighting in the woods and with their Indian allies. They had a cadre of officers, including, critically, Captain Beaujeu, who were very experienced in working with the Indians, and were instrumental in gathering large numbers of them to oppose the British. Captain Beaujeu led a French-Canadian-Indian force out to meet Braddock's advance. In the first clash the French and Canadians were thrown back and Captain Beaujeu killed, but at that point the Indians essentially took control of the battle, using their knowledge of fighting in the forest to rapidly outflank the British column, inflicting casualties from cover and particularly picking off the officers. The British troops, trained to stand in ranks and fire by volley on

command, rather than picking and firing at targets, wasted their ammunition firing into the trees, and at time in the confusion into each other. The American independent companies and rangers attached to Braddock's column, used to fighting Indian style, often ended up being decimated by friendly fire. Near the end of the battle it was the American troops who established a rear guard and enabled the survivors to withdraw.

Braddock's defeat was followed by a series of defeats for British troops, but the survivors proved they were able to learn and they developed light infantry tactics based on the French and Indian tactics that enabled them to conquer French North America. But then they rapidly forgot the lessons and as the author points out the retreat of the British column from the battles of Lexington and Concord while harassed by colonial militia were almost a replay of Braddock's defeat.

Among the longer term affects of Braddock's defeat was increased friction between the British army and government and the colonists and the colonial governments. The Monongahela and other British defeats further eroded the status of British regular troops in the eyes of the colonists. The British officer class generally looked down upon the colonists. A serious source of friction was that it was difficult for colonials to gain commissions in the British army, and colonial troops were usually under British officers.

Significantly, when tensions reached the breaking point and revolution broke out, three of the leading American generals, native born George Washington and British immigrants Horatio Gates and Charles Lee, were veterans and survivors of Braddock's defeat, who put their experience to use creating an American army that combined the lessons of Europeand and American war fighting.

Christopher Saunders says

David L. Preston's Braddock's Defeat serves as a revisionist corrective to standard narratives about the French and Indian War. It's a detailed military history of Braddock's march and defeat along the Monongahela, yet he expands beyond the common narrative of the battle to show a more fleshed-out picture. He devotes significant space to the French expedition to Ft. Duquesne, with Captain Beaujeu (who, like Braddock, perished in the battle) coming off as a particularly heroic figure. He's much kinder to Braddock, showing that his contempt for colonials was much less pervasive than argued, that his tactics were neither inappropriate nor inherently disastrous, that he made an effort to befriend Indians rather than scorn them...he refutes pretty much every point McCardell and other makes. Your mileage may vary how much of this you accept, but it's a convincing case. You might almost wonder why Braddock lost, though Preston argues it was less a screw-up or blunder on the Brit's part than his simply being outgeneralled by French and Indian leaders who knew the terrain and who had the guts and flexibility to pull off an unlikely victory.

Brian says

The pivotal moments in American History series always delivers well researched and thoughtful books and Braddock's Defeat is no exception. This book traces how the defeat of Braddock led to the American revolution by giving the colonists an identity and binding them in the face of war. The roads built by Braddock's army became conduits for the French and Indians to attack the British colonies and cemented a loyalty creating heroes like George Washington, Gates, and Lee. The book traces the efforts of Braddock's European army to march to the site of what is now Pittsburgh across hellish terrain that had to be carved out by General St. Clair's construction corps and the eventual defeat by the French and the Indians. It was from these battles that an American style of warfare was developed that used the Indian tactics and not traditional European tactics that would serve the Americans well in the early days of the revolution. Well written,

concisely argued and sheds light on a complicated topic that is an essential addition for anyone looking to understand the road to the American Revolution.

Matt says

Even if George Washington had never led the Continental Army to victory in the American Revolution, even if he never served as the first President of the United States of America, he would have gone down in history as a figure of world-historical impact. At the age of 23, following a short, confused fight at a place later called Jumonville's Glen, young George Washington sparked a world war.

The year was 1754. The French were fortifying strategic locations in the Ohio Valley. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia ordered Washington to take a force into the frontier and "defend" it from any encroaching Frenchmen. On May 28, Washington and forty soldiers, along with an Indian ally known as the Half King, came upon a party of French camped in a narrow glen. Someone – we don't know who – fired a shot. Chaos erupted. Washington's men delivered two volleys. The French tried to escape, but were blocked by the Half King's warriors. Washington's troops kept the French pinned down until one of them asked for quarter.

The leader of the French was an ensign named Jumonville. He claimed to be a peace emissary, with a letter from Louis XV. Washington took the letter to be translated. As he turned away from his prisoner, the Half King battered Jumonville's skull with his hatchet, until the French officer's cranium came apart. Then, as described by historian Fred Anderson in *Crucible of War*, the Half King **"reached into the skull, pulled out a handful of viscous tissue, and washed his hands in Jumonville's brain."**

Washington initially marveled at the singsong of bullets during battle. But the tide turned on him quickly. On July 3, his men were surrounded at the Great Meadows, defending an indefensible garrison aptly named Fort Necessity. Washington surrendered, and under some duress, signed a document attesting to his assassination of Jumonville. The war, known in America as the French & Indian War, and globally as the Seven Years' War, had begun.

Great Britain's response was to send Major General Edward Braddock and two Irish units, the 44th and 48th Regiment of Foot, to America. Their mission was to march through the wilderness to the Forks of the Ohio, to level the French outpost called Fort Duquesne. The march towards Fort Duquesne was grueling. Braddock's men had to hack their way through rugged, mountainous, heavily forested terrain, dragging a long train, including artillery, behind them. Due to colonial recalcitrance in helping to supply Braddock's expedition, the column lacked wagons, food, and healthy draft animals.

Eventually, Braddock split his column, going ahead of the main body with a "flying column" of around 1,300 Redcoats and colonial militia. On July 9, 1755, a much smaller force of French, Canadian, and Indians struck Braddock's advance party. The Indians, acting as highly-skilled light infantry, swarmed along the flanks of the long column of British troopers. It was as lopsided a victory as you can imagine. At a cost of a handful of casualties (the high end is 100 total, some estimates are literally numbered by the fingers of your hands), the British suffered over 800 killed and wounded.

Among the dead was General Braddock, shot through the lung and buried in the middle of his road, where it dipped into a ravine. The wagons of his retreating army passed over the unmarked grave, to hide it from looters.

This riveting, somewhat forgotten story of Colonial America is told in exacting detail by David Preston. *Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution* supplants all previous works

on this battle, and is unlikely to be surpassed. The level of research is astounding. At times, the minutiae threatens to overwhelm. Still, it is my opinion that one should always err on providing too much, rather than too little.

This is the rare history book that works equally well for longtime students or first time readers (in terms of the French & Indian War, I'm somewhere in between). It is sophisticated and exhaustive, but also lays out the groundwork for anyone interested in the subject to jump right in. The first four chapters are given over to context, explaining how the British, the French, the American colonists, and the Indians had all come to vie for the Ohio Valley. This isn't a simple tale. The French & Indian War is a rather complex subject, as four different cultures with vastly different designs jockeyed for the most advantageous position in an increasingly-crowded continent. Preston does his best, however, to methodically explain the events leading to the explosion of violence along the Monongahela River.

Like I said above, there is a lot of detail. The pages sometimes feel almost crammed.

Ever wondered how the British Redcoats took care of their madder-red uniforms? Wonder no more.

Black shoes and cartridge pouches were black-balled, literally, with small orbs made of beeswax and blacking. Cracks, scratches, dents in the musket stocks were covered with beeswax; metal and brass parts were cleaned and brightly polished with a combination of oil, brick dust, emery cloth, and rock abrasives such as whiting or rottenstone. The yellowish-brown hue on buff leather belts was maintained by applications of ochre balls; and white pipe clay made an excellent medium for whitening gaiters.

This is great stuff. Nuggets like this make history more tactile, something you can almost see, and touch, and smell. Also, I've been whitening my gaiters with whiteout I steal from the office supply closet, so I learned a helpful new tip!

The wealth of information overflows into eight (!) appendices that give you orders of battle, casualties, and a selection of primary source documents. Black & white illustrations are peppered throughout the text, and there is an inset of beautiful color plates in the middle. There are a lot of maps, both contemporary and designed specifically for this book. The one map issue I had was the decision to overlay the battle maps onto the town map of Braddock, Pennsylvania. The point, I suppose, was to show where past events took place in relation to modern landmarks. I just found it irritating, as it made the most important maps extremely busy and cluttered.

Braddock's Defeat succeeds or fails in its presentation of the Battle of the Monongahela. If you do everything else right, but can't stick the landing, then this is a failure. Fortunately, Preston delivers. His thorough narrative covers all aspects of the roughly three-hour long battle, from the initial collision to the hasty retreat by the English. He intermingles tactical discussions with primary source descriptions, and does a good job of trying to separate the facts from the myths. Throughout *Braddock's Defeat*, Preston attempts to rehabilitate the reputations of Braddock (and his men). Certainly, Braddock had his deficits. It is also true, however, that subsequent events (the American Revolution) made him a convenient lightning rod for everything wrong in British-Colonial relations (see, e.g., British arrogance; rigidity verses fluidity of tactics; the presumed superiority of British verses Colonial arms; the presumed superiority of British verses Colonial officers, etc.). Preston agrees that provincial tactics of disperse and cover proved the proper course. At the same time, he recognizes the tactical constraints of the British Army (they were trained for years in a specific way, and you can't just drop that at the first gunshot), as well as the superior martial abilities of the French and Indians. In Preston's telling, this was a French-Indian victory as much as it was "Braddock's defeat."

Preston traveled Braddock's road himself, and this sense of place really helps him to deliver a vivid description of battle. He is really good at illustrating the fear and adrenaline that must have surged through each British soldier as he stood in line of battle in a smoke-filled forest, encircled by the aural presence of invisible enemies.

A sense of being surrounded and cut off took hold, and soon Gage's main column was facing outward...Officers yelled "Make Ready!" The soldiers' muskets were at full cock, ready to be presented and fired at the officers' commands. However, lack of sleep and emotional exhaustion – the alternating troughs of euphoria and fear – were beginning to take their toll on Gage's men. Discipline was the next casualty, as the men "threw away their Fire" without waiting for the commands of officers, more and more of whom were dead or wounded. The batman of Captain Cholmley of the 48th saw his master felled from his horse and killed in the first ten minutes of the fight. One account of the battle related "hellish Treatment of poor Capt. Chomondeley" by two Indian warriors who were alleged to have rushed in, scalped him as he lay wounded, and rubbed his brains on their joints. Traumatized and terrified Redcoats who witnessed such acts began to fire at anything that moved amid the smoke that began to cover them like a shroud...

Preston tries to balance sheer narrative momentum with an ongoing analysis of sources (his annotated notes are very good, too). This doesn't always work perfectly. For instance, there is the saga of two six-pound cannons that were with the British working party when the French attacked. In the space of several pages, Preston seems to contradict himself. On one page he writes that Gage "most likely ordered" the two cannon to begin firing; on the next, that language changes to something more certain, and Gage has now "immediately deployed the two brass 6-pounders"; eight pages later, it is suddenly St. Clair who ordered the guns "immediately" formed, "perhaps at Gage's request." Then you look at the notes and see there is some argument whether the six-pounders were fired at all. (They probably were). This is clearly unreasonable nitpicking on my part, but it's something I noticed. A narrative history attempts to present a relatively seamless story by choosing one version of how the facts played out. An analytical history might present a narrative, but it also weighs the evidence and presents multiple versions of what might have happened. Here, the combination of the two styles sometimes get entangled.

The current view of the French & Indian War is that it sowed the ground for Revolution. It created huge costs for Great Britain, that needed to be paid with taxes. It strained relations between Colonial leaders and the Crown. It also showed Americans that Redcoats were not the unbeatable machine they appeared. In *Braddock's Defeat*, Preston provides a comprehensive portrait of a bloody, terrifying battle. He also shows you the all the stress points between Great Britain and her American subjects that would, in the span of twenty years, fracture in ways that changed the world forever.

W Charles says

This is THE book to read on this battle and its importance in American history. It is very well researched, uncovering new sources and very well written.

Ross says

This is really a very depressing story of British stupidity and incompetence. Braddock was sent to the colonies in 1755 with two regiments of regular troops to destroy the French Fort Duquesne which had been established in the western wilderness at a site that is now downtown Pittsburgh.

General Braddock had no fighting experience and neither had the great majority of his troops. Upon arriving the expedition pressed another thousand colonists, most of whom also had no fighting experience.

After horrendous effort marching west to reach the enemy fort, Braddock split his forces in two and approached the fort with his regulars in a two mile long column through dense woods along a narrow path. He had no scouts sweeping the woods ahead on either side.

As a result some 300 Indians waiting on each side of the trail slaughtered his men with their accurate musket fire from behind trees. Braddock was mortally wounded and the few of his men that survived retreated back to the half of his forces left 60 miles behind. All equipment and guns were abandoned and all the remaining party scurried back East, having now armed the French at the fort with the abandoned guns and other equipment.

I am only giving this 2 stars because too much of the work is the author's speculation and because it is so sad to read.

Raymond says

Painstakingly in detail Braddock's march across PA.

Great historical compilation that took about as long to read as it did to cross PA with George Washington himself.

Steven Peterson says

This is a wonderful history of General James Braddock's campaign to capture Fort Duquesne and then continue with additional forays against French forces during the French and Indian War. Things did not work out as intended. . . . This book explores the background of English forces being sent to the colonies, the strategic decisions behind Braddock's march, the Battle of the Monongahela, and its aftermath.

The volume begins with the disadvantage to the colonies and the British Empire. A decision was finally made to send British forces (two regiments of regulars) to the colonies under the command of General James Braddock. Here, the reader gets a sense of Braddock's background and the evolution of his military career. His work had been solid and he seemed a good choice to command the expedition.

Upon his arrival, it was assumed that his regulars would be augmented by substantial colonial troops as well as Indians sympathetic with the British. This marked one of the first errors in assumptions--few Indians joined the expedition, stripping the British forces of scouts and a screen against French and Indians forces. More disappointments followed: supplies promised by the colonies were scarce, as governors had a difficult time getting food and other supplies needed for the march on Fort Duquesne. Benjamin Franklin played a positive role in getting some supplies and wagons to the force.

The march began--quite challenging as the force had to deal with mountains and rivers. George Washington served as an ad hoc staff member. Others who had a role to play in the Revolutionary War were also involved, such as future generals Gage (on the British side), Lee and Gates (on the American side), as well as

Daniel Morgan. Their involvement adds an interesting dimension to the book.

After a difficult march, the battle of Monongahela began--much to the disadvantage of the British and colonial forces. They were caught in a difficult geographic position and the French and Indians opposing them used different tactics to envelop British forces. Indeed, the casualties among French and Indians was quite modest--whereas the British and colonial casualties were quite heavy--including Braddock himself.

The retreat was difficult. The British support at a fort to the rear was scarcely praiseworthy and the retreat continued. The result was viewed as a catastrophe in the colonies and in Great Britain. It is good that the book does not end there, but speaks of the aftermath of the defeat. The British invested more troops into the war and changed their tactics to some extent. The book also considers the linkage between the French and Indian War and the Revolution itself.

All in all, an excellent volume. . . .
