



*Hodges' Scout: A Lost Patrol of the French and Indian War* by Len Travers.

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The average American knows very little about the French and Indian War<sup>1</sup> (1754–63). This global conflict ended French dominance in Canada and elsewhere in North America. It also had major consequences for the future of the American colonies along the continent's eastern seaboard. Yet it featured fewer than a dozen European-style pitched battles. The French depended heavily on Native American allies, while British forces comprised mostly colonists and far fewer Indians.

In *Hodges' Scout*, historian Len Travers<sup>2</sup> (UMass Dartmouth) recounts a little known and (perhaps unplanned) ambush of some forty-eight untrained colonists, mostly from southern Massachusetts, by a force three times larger consisting of Native Americans led by a handful of French soldiers. Sixteen of the British provincials were killed, five escaped, and the remainder were either "killed or captured" by the Indians, as the official records note. The engagement fought that day in September 1756 faded away like so many unfortunate events in the wilderness war for control of the continent.

Travers has now produced an account of the lost British patrol based on meticulous research into the actions and personalities involved.

The narrative that follows assumes that the lives and experiences of ordinary men and women in war are as instructive, and as compelling, as those of the "great" .... The stories of those who died with Captain Hodges, and of those who lived to tell of it, form the heart of this account. Theirs are stories worth retrieving, as the experiences of war, for the common soldier, are largely made up of events that never command public attention. And in the stories surrounding the circumstances of Hodges' Scout the reader will discover facets of this war not usually addressed in standard chronicles. (1, 3)

The book contains two sections: "Hodges' Scout" and "Captives." The first sets the context of the fight, with careful attention to the circumstances and traits of often inexperienced provincial soldiers, the tremendous logistical problems entailed by operations in the interior, and French and British grand strategies.

At the core of the story is the seesaw struggle in the Lake Champlain and Lake George regions, where safeguarding lines of communication was critical to mounting a killing thrust into French Canada or down the Hudson River into the English northern and middle colonies. The French had posts at Crown Point and Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain, the British at Fort William Henry on Lake George. The English forces wished to deny the French and Indians the mobility they enjoyed on both land and water in the theater.

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1. Called the "Seven Years' War" by European historians.

2. His earlier work includes *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: UMass Pr, 1997) and, as co-editor with Sheila McIntyre, *The Correspondence of John Cotton Jr.* (Boston: Colonial Soc. of Mass., 2009).

In waging forest warfare, both sides desperately needed intelligence on enemy movements and capabilities in order to conduct ambushes, interdict enemy routes, inflict psychological defeat, and mount preemptive strikes. Major Robert Rogers and his rangers, being spread thinly over a vast woodland region, were often unavailable for security duties and intelligence gathering. Hence, the garrison at Fort William Henry sent out company-sized (ca. fifty-man) units to “scout”—in today’s terms, carry out reconnaissance-in-force—and engage the enemy if appropriate.

Captain Joseph Hodges volunteered to lead a company of soldiers on a routine scout along the shore of Lake George, not expecting to meet a large concentration of hostile forces. After they did, in less than an hour, Hodges and fifteen of his comrades lay dead on the battlefield, scalped and mutilated. Survivors escaped through the woods or were captured by Indians moving away from the conflict and seeking refuge. Relief parties from Fort William Henry found only the grisly, unrecognizable remains of their comrades. Following burial services, the garrison prepared to fight their enemy, but an engagement was slow in coming. Hodges’ scout became one of a number of setbacks soon forgotten as larger operations came into play.

The second half of the book, on the fate of some of the British captives, showcases the results of Travers’s impressive research efforts. He recounts at length the story of Ensign Jeremiah Lincoln, who was turned over to the French after the battle and spirited away to Montreal, where he worked in servitude before he and three other men escaped in the late spring. Starvation, daunting terrain, constant uncertainty, fear of capture, and physical limitations took their toll, forcing two of the men to surrender at Crown Point and reenter captivity. Lincoln and his companion—after ten months as prisoners, sixteen days of escape, and 180 miles of rough travel—broke through the clearing at Fort William Henry to report their experience and observations of the enemy.

Peleg Stevens, on the other hand, became a “world” traveler before returning home. He lived with his Indian captors for over a year before the French purchased him and sent him to Quebec and thence to France as part of a prisoner exchange. He remained in French jails until he gained his freedom in March 1758 and then lived in England for four more months before boarding a ship to America. He landed in Boston on 18 September 1758, two years to the day since his captivity began.

Most prisoners were less fortunate. Their captors enjoyed the prestige of having their own slaves perform menial tasks and endure public humiliation. The prisoners were also exchanged for money or trade goods with the French, who wanted them to work in Montreal or Quebec. One of Hodges’ men, Isaac Foster, spent months traveling to the far side of Lake Superior before settling in with the Ojibwa-Ottawa-Pottawatomie groups in their frigid tribal lands. He lived with these people for two years, until they sold him to the French in Detroit, who in turn sent him north to Montreal, where he was eventually liberated after the final French surrender, having spent three years and two months in captivity.

Many others on both sides were exchanged at the end of the war. One of them, Jonathan Barnes, a member of Hodges’ scout, was actually unhappy to be repatriated, for he had sided with his captors, worked against his fellow prisoners, and gained the Indians’ favor. At war’s end, the British court-martialed and hanged him as an example to would-be traitors. Detailed court records give us a vivid picture of these events as well as insights into the military court system of the time more generally

Besides pertinent primary sources, the author is fully conversant with recent literature on the behavior and psychological stress of men in combat and the composition of colonial armies.<sup>3</sup> His center of focus is common men tested in a crucible of events that evoked the best and worst of each one. From his study of a seemingly insignificant incident in the French and Indian War, Len Travers manages to shed light on matters ranging from grand schemes of empire to Native American attitudes to POWs, village life in France, and the working and purpose of courts-martial. In cases where he must leave elements of the story to conjecture, he points the reader toward two or three viable alternative paths of interpretation. For all these reasons, I heartily recommend *Hodges' Scout* to anyone interested in the French and Indian War, colonial studies, or Native American warfare.

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3. See his extremely helpful "Essay on Sources" (287–94).