

Len Travers. *Hodges' Scout: A Lost Patrol of the French and Indian War*. Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. 320.

Len Travers, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, wrote an excellent book on Fourth of July celebrations in the antebellum U.S.¹ In *Hodges' Scout*, Travers leaves the 1800s for the 1700s, and presents the compelling story of Hodges' Scout, a group of fifty soldiers who went on a seemingly routine patrol during the French and Indian War. What happened to them, however, was anything but routine. Many soldiers were killed in battle with the French and their Indigenous allies. A few escaped and returned to the camp. Others, it was later discovered, were taken captive. After various odysseys, some found their way home. Others never returned. Today, Travers comments, "only a few specialists are aware of the incident; no modern history of the French and Indian War even mentions it. The omission is understandable. In terms of numbers, the loss of Hodges' command was hardly of significant consequence to the conflict" (1). Travers takes what is little more than a historical footnote and, through meticulous research in English and French-language sources, illuminates the complex world of Hodges' Scout.

First and foremost, this is a study about individuals. Travers tells the story of a small group of predominantly young men. He argues that "the experiences of war, for the common soldier, are largely made up of events that never command public attention" (3). Why, he asks, should the experiences of common soldiers be subsumed beneath those of generals and leaders? Travers dislikes the fact that the history of warfare elevates prominent individuals and relegates many others to obscurity. He notes that "historians are wont to write of wars as aggregate experiences: 'generals' decide, 'armies' move, 'soldiers' clash, 'casualties' mount, 'the dead' are buried. Likewise, 'captives' are taken—and then largely ignored. But in all of these cases, and on the home front as well, war was—and still is—felt and understood by its participants at a deeply personal level" (1). "The lives and experiences of ordinary men and women in war are as instructive," Travers asserts, "as those of the 'great'" (1). At times, it feels like Travers overstates the tendency of military history to

¹ Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

obscure individuals. To be sure, one can find plenty of military history books that take a “battles and leaders approach.” However, plenty of books take the “common soldier” very seriously and spend a great deal of time analyzing them. Nevertheless, Travers makes an eloquent case for including the great as well as the unknown. He echoes the Brazilian historian Laura de Mello e Souza who wrote, in an examination of witchcraft in Brazil, that understanding the stories of obscure colonists “helps us remember that beneath the single face of Clio lies a hidden mosaic of individual adventures, which may be recovered.”² One of the great contributions of this volume is recovering some of the individual adventures and complicating the mosaic historians have crafted about the French and Indian War.

Travers opens with a description of the fate of Hodges’ Scout. Although largely unknown today, in 1756 it was a “shocking affair,” because, “in terms of the *proportion* of white men lost in a woods engagement, it was almost unmatched since the darkest days of King Philip’s War” (14). What we do not see as particularly important, many people at the time saw as a disaster. Travers devotes the first part of the book to the fatal event and to the social history of war. Thus, he analyzes the men composing Hodges’ Company and what brought them to the shores of Lake George. Nonspecialists need not be leery; Travers is a knowledgeable guide and makes sure readers do not get lost in a thicket of detail. Hodges, at forty-one, was older than most of the men in his company. Some were there for the money, others to prove themselves. Things did not go well for the British and Americans. Delays ruined the plans of John Winslow, the American commander, for a spring campaign. Furthermore, French and Indian raiders seemed to be everywhere. These raids had minor tactical consequences. However, to counter them, Winslow sent out scouts, or patrols of fifty men, composed of soldiers from different companies. Hodges’ Scout, therefore, included men from other companies. Travers devotes a chapter to discussing the slaughter of Hodges’ Scout. He analyzes competing perspectives, some of the survivors had wildly divergent stories, and tries to make sense of what happened.³ We

² Laura de Mello e Souza, *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross: Witchcraft, Slavery, and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil*, translated by Diane Grosklaus Whitty (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 219.

³ Travers, in examining an event from several different perspectives, uses a similar approach to Karl Jacoby’s *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008).

cannot, Tracers asserts, “know with certainty what happened when the two forces met” (103). However, in an interesting chapter, Travers mines the journal of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, a mathematician and French officer, for clues. Bougainville observed the grisly results of wilderness warfare and labeled it “an abominable way to make war” (117).

What happened to the captives who survived the massacre? In Part II, Travers answers these questions. Ensign Jeremiah Lincoln, for instance, was transported by Indigenous peoples to Montreal. For some unknown reason, General Montcalm bought Lincoln from his captor and sent him to Montreal. Although European conventions forbade forced labour by prisoners of war, “no one frowned on the practice of releasing them into civilian hands in exchange for their labor” (129). Thus, to modern readers, Lincoln’s fate might not seem like a happy one. However, Lincoln’s fellow survivors “would have done almost anything to trade places with him” because of their justified fears of being captives (125). After spending months in Montreal, Lincoln and several fellow captives decided to escape. Despite tremendous risks, Lincoln and one of his fellow escapees managed to return to Fort William Henry and “accomplished what only a handful of men had done so far, or would do for the rest of the war” (147).

Unlike Lincoln, Peleg Stevens and Isaac Foster were not purchased by General Montcalm. Stevens was held captive by Indigenous peoples for thirteen months. In the aftermath of the 1757 massacre at Fort William Henry, the French redeemed as many captives as possible. Thus, men like Stevens “found themselves incarcerated briefly and then bundled aboard ships bound for the Atlantic” (155). Following an unpleasant voyage, Stevens arrived in France. After spending time in a French prison, he was redeemed, crossed the English Channel, spent a few months in England, and then returned to America. Isaac Foster, on the other hand, did not cross the Atlantic. However, his captivity was the longest, loneliest, and most isolated, because his Indigenous captors took him to Lake Nipigon. One year later, Foster’s master took him to Detroit and a Frenchman ransomed him. Foster had to work to pay his ransom, but, as Travers contends, he “recovered something of his pride, certainly of his humanity, and his sense of manhood” (191). After paying this debt, Foster was sent to Montreal as a prisoner of war, exchanged, and then sent home. Despite his terrible experiences,

Foster was more fortunate than some of his fellow survivors because, “he had been to the western edges of France’s North American empire and had returned” (194). Others did not.

As Travers indicates, the fate of some of the survivors is unknown. Of the people whose fate is known, some met unhappy ends. Joseph Abbot, for instance, died in prison in Quebec. Jonathan Barnes was court-martialed and executed. Barnes’s fate was “entirely unknown until a chance encounter months after the fighting ceased” (210). In 1761, Lieutenant Hugh Meredith thought he recognized the white interpreter travelling with a group of Wabanakis. Meredith found the man suspicious and arrested him. The interpreter was Jonathan Barnes, late of Hodges’ Scout. Barnes was tried before a British court-martial and was alleged to have cooperated with the capture and abuse of British soldiers. Travers, however, wonders if things were so cut and dried. Barnes may well have been a traitor, but he could have also have been a victim of Stockholm Syndrome. Whatever the case, Barnes was convicted and executed.

The men of Hodges’ Scout, Travers concludes, are not entirely lost to history because “it is possible to reconstruct past lives, at least in part, from the limited and scattered records” (245). Thus, in addition to being a fascinating exploration of a lost patrol and their world, this book is tailor-made for historical methods classes. It is an excellent demonstration of how a talented and capable historian can take scattered pieces of evidence and create from them a compelling and powerful story. Travers also vindicates the importance of individuals and how the stories of “common people” are fully as important as the stories of elites. For these reasons, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in historical methods, the French and Indian War, global history, and military history. It will appeal to both an academic and a general audience.

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