

BOOK REVIEWS



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

By David Preston

Oxford University Press, 2015

Hardback, 480 pp.,

20 illus., \$29.95

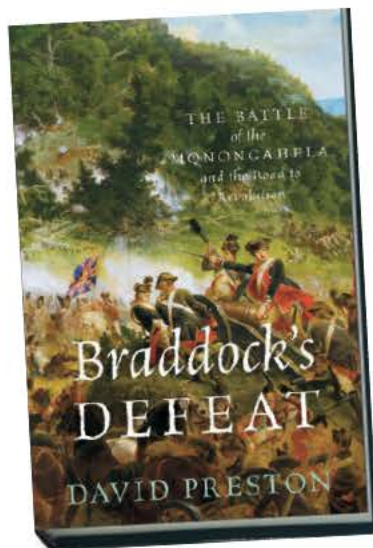
Reviewed by Bob Hoover, retired book editor of the
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The name Braddock can be found from Northern Virginia to Western Pennsylvania on roads, parks, lakes, and communities although its namesake, British Gen. Edward Braddock, lived only a few months in that region.

At 61 years old, General Braddock arrived in America in March 1755 as head of the largest military expedition in the British colonies at that time. His mission was to oust the French from Fort Duquesne at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, opening the territory for British developers. His 300-mile march from Alexandria, Virginia, to what is now Braddock, was a triumph of ingenuity and endurance.

Braddock, however, was dead four months later in the woods south of Uniontown, his retreating army in tatters. The magnitude of his defeat immortalized his name. It was a catastrophe for Great Britain, the high tide of France's power in North America and a respite for American Indians threatened by the westward expansion of Europeans.

While military historian David Preston acknowledges the immediate impact of



the battle, he argues that the long-term effect was to pave the way for the victory of Americans over their British rulers 28 years later: "Indeed, the memory of Braddock's Defeat cast a long shadow, one that stretched to include the origin of the American Revolution," he writes, "and particularly the colonists' decision to take up arms."

What the result told colonists was that the formidable English army could be defeated using the tactics of the French and their Indian allies. The performance of colonial troops at Braddock's Defeat—they covered the retreat as British fighters fled—added to their confidence.


Preston's account of the fighting on July 9 draws from a variety of sources, some cited for the first time, and brings the awful nature of the battle into sharp focus. Perhaps 300 French forces were involved, but the bulk of attackers were Indians from many tribes, nearly 700, firing into the column of British troops on both flanks. Braddock was wounded, evacuated by his aide George Washington. He died four days later and was buried in the road so that the army's footsteps and wagon tracks would hide his grave. Today, his relocated gravesite is marked with a memorial on U.S. 40, just north of Fort Necessity.

Between 1,200 to 1,400 British and colonial soldiers fought that day; Preston puts the casualty rate at more than 60 percent killed or wounded, many slaughtered as they lay helplessly injured. Some wounded were stripped, marched to Fort Duquesne, tortured, and burned alive.

While the battle is the centerpiece of "Braddock's Defeat," Preston paints a full picture of conditions in 1755 North America that brings a clear perspective to that complicated era which included the defeat of France in the New World and the American Revolution.

He also rehabilitates Braddock's reputation as dismissive of native help, reinforces the stalwart character of Washington, and praises Benjamin Franklin for his help in bolstering the expedition.

Braddock's Defeat also tells the French side of the story. Experienced military officers are credited at last with the strategy that defeated a much larger force, an action that included a journey from Montreal that rivaled Braddock's march in its efforts.

Preston sought to write a definitive history of the seminal 1755 battle of the Mon and he succeeded. 

Always a Home Game: Our Journey Through Steelers Country in 140 Days

By Josh Miller and Shawn Allen

St. Lynn's Press, 2014

240 pp., illustrations, chart

\$19.74 hardcover

Reviewed by Carrie Hadley,
Cataloger for the Museum Division

It's an intimidating feeling—it's Sunday morning, and you, a loyal Steelers fan, are vacationing or living outside of Pittsburgh and need a reliable bar to watch the game later.