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BRADDOCK'S DEFEAT BATTLE OF MONOGAHELA, 9 JULY 1755

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NOTE: A FEW CONSEQUENCES OF BRADDOCK'S DEFEAT

The Battle of the Monongahela, 9 July 1755, is better known as Braddock's Defeat, an accurate label that puts the event in appropriate perspective. The decisive and unexpected rout of the combined force of British regulars and colonial volunteers commanded by Brigadier General Edward Braddock by a much smaller force of French troops and Indian warriors in the North American wilderness impacted on events and perceptions both immediate and long-range, cultural as well as military.

The most immediate military effect was the abrupt and inglorious end of the 1755 British campaign against Fort Duquesne, located at the fork of the Ohio River, gateway to the Trans-Appalachian wilderness and fur trade. British strategy against the French in North America suffered a major setback, their influence over the Indians dramatically eroded, and frontier settlement receded eastward. On the positive side, lessons had been learned in frontier warfare, even by the ill-fated and mortally wounded Braddock, whose dying words, uttered near the battlefield, were reputedly to the effect that next time

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"...we shall know how to deal with them." Subsequent reforms in British military organization and tactics in North America reflected Braddock's experience. These included more recruitment of frontier-wise American colonials into the regular forces and the use of light infantry units and tactics for frontier warfare. These minor but nonetheless measurable changes became institutionalized in the Royal American Regiment, which exonerated Braddock's Defeat at Bushy Run, 1763.

Although Braddock suffered, the name and character of George Washington prospered and became more widely known. As a militia colonel and aide to General Braddock, his bravery and coolness during the battle were salvaged from the debacle and extolled with pride by American colonists. Without being so singled out, would Washington have become an obvious candidate for command of the rebel army in 1775? Additionally, Washington symbolized for Americans then and later a cultural superiority of American ways over those of the British. Braddock's defeat so viewed highlighted certain underlying cultural differences that had evolved between the colonies and mother country. British regimentation and stubbornness, symbolized by Braddock and his European-style tactics, contrasted with American frontier individualism and innovation. The British defeat thus helped lessen confidence in British protection and made colonials more aware of their self-reliance, an important step toward national independence.