

The Leadership Failure of Major General Edward Braddock

by

MAJ Joseph Jackson

The Global War on Terrorism, though unique to our time, is not the first, nor likely the last, in which a conventional and highly specialized army will engage an intelligent and dynamic non-conventional adversary. Presently the United States finds her armed forces deployed to the distant lands of Iraq and Afghanistan. They remain engaged in a war that continues to consume our martial resources and promises to continue for the foreseeable future. Since the end of major combat operations in 2003, The Long War continues to demand an extraordinary effort of commitment and personal sacrifice by our service members. Central to achieving victory and sustaining our vision of success is leadership - the most essential and enigmatic element of Battle Command. Leadership remains the common denominator that binds a unit together in the persistent unpredictability of war.

Historical precedent provides helpful insights that enable us to fully appreciate our current operational paradigm. However, our past triumphs do not guarantee future victories. This paper examines an example of military history which illuminates potential leadership pitfalls. In this instance, inflexible leadership resulted in the defeat of a combined Anglo-American army enroute to Fort Duquesne in July 1755.

The British commander of the expedition, Major General Edward Braddock's leadership remained rigid in a foreign land. His narrow approach to organizational leadership contributed to the destruction of the command that he recruited, trained, and employed. This occurred for several reasons. Braddock failed to consider the difficulty of the terrain. He also failed to take in to account the cultural norms and values espoused by colonial militia troops. These varied greatly from those which he encountered in his European service.

Braddock's leadership shortfalls, coupled with an arrogant personality, did not allow him to remain objective in formulating key decisions. These limitations prevented him from accepting the advice and counsel of those who knew the country better than he did. The combination of inflexibility, failure to recognize the perspective of the colonials, and prejudices formed from his prior service, led Braddock to a series of decisions that ultimately contributed to his defeat and the destruction of his force.

The tragedy of Braddock's campaign against Fort Duquesne did not immediately add to the overall development of a recognizable leadership model. However, this loss reinforces the premise that those employed in the profession of arms must maintain a historical perspective. The formulation of doctrine suitable to the times arises from theoretical perspective based on the events of history. Because we recognize the importance of studying the short-comings of leaders such as Braddock, we strive to train our leaders with a focused system to establish competency.

Today, The United States Army expects its military leaders to accept and model all facets of leadership in order to be effective. Our leadership model delineates our core competencies. It is based on doctrine developed through historical study, which proposes a list of essential leadership traits. Leaders are now trained and poised to make decisions and react decisively to the unexpected. The continued success of one of our nation's most sacred institutions depends upon trained, intelligent, and adaptable leadership. The figure below illustrates the core competency areas that facilitate the overall leadership dynamic expected of today's warrior-leaders.



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This model of leadership applies to organizational level leaders. According to our present doctrine, this model applies to commanders from brigade to corps levels. These levels impart leading and organizing functions to units ranging in size from several thousand to the tens of thousands. Essential leader duties within this framework include setting policy, managing multiple priorities and resources, and establishing a long-term vision that empowers others to perform their assigned mission.¹ These priorities and competencies facilitate the enactment of leadership across an organization through the warfighting functions. These functions enable commanders to orchestrate and synchronize all aspects of a unit's activities through space and

¹ U.S. Army, Field Manual 6-22. *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile*. Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 2005. 3-7.

time.² The three broad competency areas of leading, developing, and achieving provide the primary criteria for examining Braddock's campaign.

Origins of Braddock's Leadership

Forty-five years of service in the British army formed General Braddock's concept of leadership. The British army leadership model evolved to reflect the attributes of the aristocratic class. This social class believed that the higher social orders belonged in positions of leadership by virtue of their membership in the aristocracy. This body comprised the nobility, landed gentry, successful merchants, and members of the officer corps. Their view also posited that the masses of the lower and working classes could not organize themselves and needed guidance and direction. They therefore required the intervention of the higher social orders to provide the necessary leadership. Essentially, heredity, wealth, intelligence, and leadership all emerged from social standing. Only the privileged espoused the characteristics and capacity to learn and employ leadership. Braddock, as the son of a major general, advocated this belief system.

Unlike our army today, the British army of this period functioned without a systematic methodology and consensus of leadership values, except those based upon social standing. Therefore, leadership quality varied greatly. Professionalism and leadership ability rested upon each individual's experiences and interest in furthering his career. This lack of coherent institutional foundations did not mean that a complete vacuum existed. However, the manuals and historical texts used during this period mainly dealt with the practical concerns of maneuver and linear tactics and not leadership traits. Officers of this period regularly referenced such works as Flavius Renatus Vegetius's *De Re Militari* and Henry Bland's *Treatise of Military*

² U.S. Army, Field Manual, 5-0. *Army Planning and Orders Production*. Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 2005, 18. The war fighting functions address key areas including movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, command and control, and force protection.

Discipline, 1753 to guide them in employing their forces, but perfecting tactics took precedence over the ability to lead, inspire, and influence. If Braddock read these works remains unknown for certain. What is certain is that Braddock developed an inflexible style of leadership based in part by social stratification. The army in which he served equally relied upon historical materials that buttressed their reliance upon precision, obedience, and the use of geometric configurations.

Braddock spent the majority of his career in the Coldstream Guards. He served in Flanders and in the city of Vlissingen. Additionally, he deployed to the Netherlands during King George's War (1741-1748). His regiment participated in the battles of Fontenoy and Dettingen. However, Braddock took no part in the actual fighting. Despite his lack of actual combat experience, he continued to rise steadily in rank throughout his career. His friend, the Duke of Cumberland, the Commander and Chief of Land Forces, supported Braddock's career and selected him to lead the expedition to the North American colonies. His limited combat experience and affiliation with the highly regimented and disciplined Coldstream Guards coupled with his keen sense of entitlement rounded out Braddock's understanding of leadership.

This understanding remained underdeveloped. It failed to consider alternative ideas or other perspectives, or to consider the importance of the interpersonal dynamics inherently necessary in leading complex organizations. After Braddock established himself in North America, Benjamin Franklin noted Braddock's leadership gaps. Franklin observed that:

This General [Braddock] was I think a brave man, and might probably have made a figure as a good officer in some European war. But he had too high an opinion of the validity of regular troops, and too mean a one of both Americans and Indians. George Croghan, our Indian interpreter joined him on his march with 100 of those people who

might have been of great use to his army as guides, scouts, etc.. If he had treated them kindly; but he slighted and neglected them, and they gradually left him.³

Native Americans did not fight in linear fashion as did the Europeans. Understandably, Braddock considered them suspect and untrained. Braddock belittled and displayed a racial superiority that the Indians found insulting. Those that offered to provide service as guides for his army did so reluctantly.⁴ In contrast, the French understood the Indians' hesitation to fight in European fashion and used it to their advantage. They encouraged the Indians to use their knowledge of the land and freedom of movement to seek advantages. They often served successfully in raiding parties and their hit-and-run tactics frustrated the British colonial militia units as well as the regular army.

Braddock, whose force faced a 100-mile journey through densely forested and rugged terrain, could not see the value in working with the Indians. Although the colonists accepted that they might provide significant reconnaissance information, Braddock's rigid concept of tactical employment and belief in the superiority of British discipline and firepower did not permit him to consider this option.

Colonists fighting in the small and irregular wars of North America of previous decades (against the French and Indians) understood the intrinsic value of using the terrain to their advantage. They learned to value flexibility, speed, and decentralized control because these elements increased the chances of success. Braddock's staid methods relied upon precision of

³ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. 3rd Edition, 1977, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 223.

⁴ Walter R. Borneman, *The French and Indian War*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 53. Braddock held meetings with a number of Indian tribes, including the Delaware and Shawnee to build an alliance. Braddock's lack of diplomacy failed to raise much assistance from the natives. Less than twelve Mingo warriors remained with Braddock's army.

formation, massing of troops, and overly-centralized command and control which curtailed individual initiative. These qualities were the antithesis of what was needed in the New World.

Leading Others

Our current leadership model contends that organizations develop best in a positive environment. To create this environment a leader must prepare oneself, and then develop others. Unfortunately, General Braddock chose to narrowly interpret his contemporary tactics. In doing so, he created a command climate that relied most heavily on an inflexible, if not coercive, style of leadership. Present-day authorities on leadership such as Daniel Goleman delineate six styles of leadership: coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching. The author suggests that each of these is applicable to specific situations.

Braddock possessed several leadership qualities that, in the eyes of his superiors, made him the correct choice for commanding the operations into the Ohio Territory. Within the Coldstream Guards, he earned a reputation of a task master and strict disciplinarian. He remained an able organizer, intrepid, brave, and capable.⁵ The pending battle with the French and Indians required all of these talents in training and mobilizing his force for Fort Duquesne.

However capable, brave or organized he appeared, Braddock failed to adjust his leadership style when the situation changed. Whether in garrison, on the march to Fort Duquesne, or in actual combat, Braddock failed to make the needed decisions to allow his subordinate commanders and units to fight or respond in a manner best suited to the situation. Instead, they followed British linear tactics all the way to their demise. Goleman clearly warns of the negative effects of this overly-centralized style of leadership. He states in the *Harvard Business Review*, “If a leader relies solely on this [coercive] style or continues to use it once the

⁵ O'Meara, *Guns at the Forks*, 110-111.

emergency passes, the long-term impact of his insensitivity to morale and feelings of those he leads will be ruinous.”⁶ This is exactly what Braddock chose to do.

As the force commander, Major General Braddock established a range of policies, set priorities, and allocated resources. In these terms, he parallels our leadership model of an effective organizational leader. Faced with building and combining a force of both regular troops and colonial militia, Braddock’s overall command philosophy did not apply to both segments equally.

Once in command of his mixed regular and colonial force, Braddock did not consider that the colonial militia, the native Indians, or colonial politicians might propose tactics better suited for a wilderness campaign. Instead, Braddock insisted upon following traditional European methods. The results of his narrow views correlated proportionately to the morale of his troops. One measure of his effectiveness as a commander resides in the desertion rates of his force. Of the 122 deserters from his force, only four were from the United Kingdom. In spite of this disproportional representation, the desperate need for manpower led the Virginia Regiment to publicly declare that, “all deserters who returned with their arms were pardoned.”⁷ Braddock, in response to these activities, did not invoke the death penalty and equally did not strictly adhere to the 1000-lash rule. In spite of these measures, his army of provincials continued to experience high desertion rates. He continued to mold his army in a manner that created inflexibility devalued individual initiative.

⁶ Daniel Goleman, “Leadership That Gets Results,” *Harvard Business Review*, (March – April 2000), 83.

⁷ Alan Rogers, *Empire and Liberty: American Resistance to British Authority 1755-1763*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 35-51.

A Leader With Presence – Developing The Force

Success in European-style combat during this time required that units rigorously follow rules that reinforced their dependence upon symmetrical shapes of columns, squares, and lines. Braddock strictly adhered to these rules. In Europe, the terrain justified this methodology. Armies and units deployed from columns to lines and formed on broad open plains. They then could maneuver by wheeling and closing to within less than 100 yards to exchange fire. Braddock's lack of actual field experience accepted these tactics without considering how they might be modified if the terrain did not favor this prescribed methodology. He drilled and built his army along these concepts.

Braddock imposed a tough system of order through rigid administration, drill, and harsh discipline. Armies often used corporal punishment for infractions. The colonial militia troops deeply resented its use upon them. Accustomed to leading individualized lives, the order imposed by Braddock seemed stifling. Braddock set a brisk and authoritative pace of daily events for his command at Fort Cumberland. He did this to set the tone of importance for the upcoming campaign against Fort Duquesne. It also forced the militia units and new recruits to acquiesce to the rigors of army life. Braddock employed harsh measures. These had proved effective for other British campaigns in Europe; these methods defined his new command.

Braddock's leadership style served to form a functioning field army. He did this, as our armies do today, through hours of repetitive drill and in strict control of administration and discipline. This order imparted the essential qualities of soldiering; by instilling, individual and unit discipline across the organization. This improved their collective chances of survival in combat. The resulting organization appeared efficient, measured, and regimented. However, the

order and pageantry belied the fact that this force lacked the atmosphere to foster any individual initiative – a key component of today’s leadership model.

The force that Braddock built resembled every other contemporary army – in Europe. It could march in columns, form firing lines by platoons, and wheel. Braddock did not realize, though he knew the terrain he must traverse, that the army he constructed did not fit the environment in which he most probably would fight. At first glance, this seemed illogical. However, Braddock did not anticipate that he would fight en route to Fort Duquesne. He gambled that the French would behave in concert with the times and await the siege inside Fort Duquesne. Benjamin Franklin eerily forecasted the implications of Braddock’s proposed concept and organization. Franklin commented that:

The only danger I apprehend of obstruction to your march, is from Ambuscades of Indians, who by constant practice are dexterous in laying and executing them. And the slender line near four miles long, which your army must make, may expose it to be attack’d by surprise in its flanks, and to be cut like a thin thread into several pieces which, from their distance can not come up in time to support each other.⁸

If only he had listened and heeded the advice of one who knew the terrain and temperament and of the enemy.

A Leader With Intellectual Capacity – Achieve

Even though Braddock ignored the bulk of Franklin’s advice, he did make prudent decisions in the fundamental tactical outfitting and organizing of the force. While in garrison, he displayed his domain knowledge as he prepared the individual soldiers for the campaign. He wisely altered the load and dress of his troops given the dense forest and underbrush of the terrain. His troops stored their shoulder and waist belts and short swords. He further required the soldiers to carry only one extra shirt, a pair of stockings, an extra pair of shoes and functional brown gaiters. He replaced the heavier regulation waistcoats and breeches with ones of lighter

⁸ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. 3rd Edition, 1977, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 224.

weight. Lieutenant Henry Timberlake could testify to the effects of the humid summers for he suffered, “[a] fit of sickness by running, over-heating, and drinking large amounts of coldwater, rendering me incapable of duty.”⁹ The soldiers placed water-filled leather bladders inside their hats to prevent sunstroke. To increase practicality and utility of moving through the woods and heavy brush, the officers and non-commissioned officers stored their espartoos and halberds and exchanged them for lightweight muskets.¹⁰

Despite the adjustments Braddock made to his troops’ equipment, the elements dictated the terms of the operation to Braddock. His rate of march did not increase due to the lighter load each soldier now carried. The dense forest and rugged terrain limited his advance to an incredibly slow and ponderous four miles a day. This distance demanded 18 hours daily to complete. The fear and paranoia of Indian attacks and raids along their flanks compounded the effects of the mid-summer heat. These combined effects resulted in a fateful decision by Braddock.

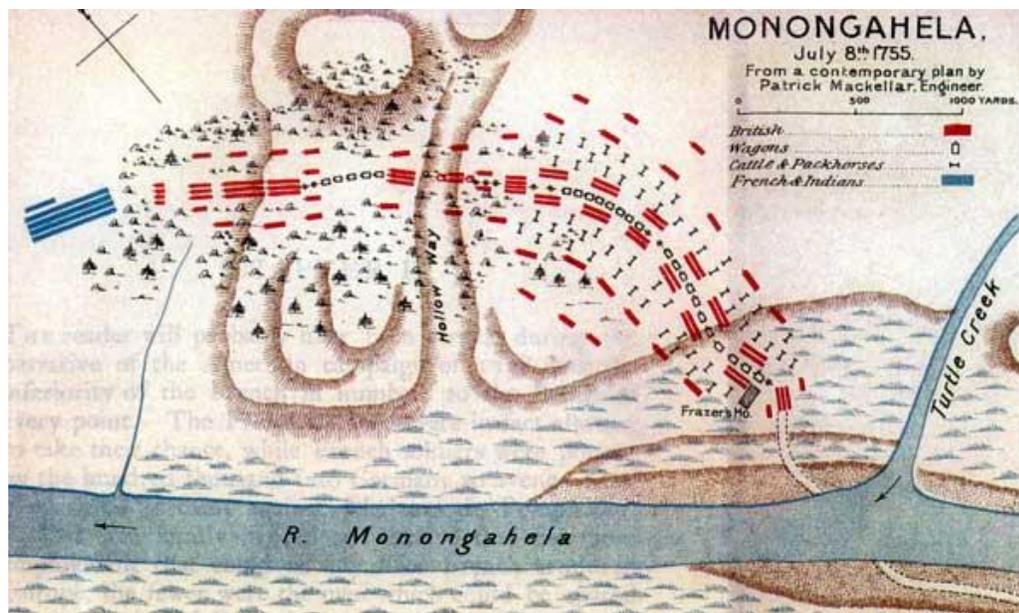
Recognizing that he needed to increase his overall speed, General Braddock abandoned his own leadership paradigm. Instead, he began to react to immediate circumstances and not to any coherent plan of action. He split the lumbering column into two sections - roughly a light and heavy column. The lighter flying column commanded by Braddock comprised approximately 1400 troops aligned in a tactical march column.¹¹ A vanguard of three hundred regulars headed the column, divided into three groups: guides, a company of grenadiers, and a reserve. A road-making company of approximately 200 Virginians and some regulars followed.

⁹ Henry Timberlake, *The Memoirs of Lieutenant Henry Timberlake, 1756-1765*. Edited by Dale Van Every, (Johnson City, Tennessee, The Watauga Press, 1927), 30.

¹⁰ Nichols, "The Organization of Braddock's Army," 142.

¹¹ Rene Chartrand, *Monongehela, 1754-1755: Washington's Defeat, Braddock's Disaster*, (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), 56.

The main body trailed a short distance of only 100-150 yards behind. This segment included about seven hundred men including the general, his staff, and about 50 guards. Flanking parties employing approximately 200 troops dispersed in groups of 10-20 men placed, 100 -150 yards off of each flank of the column. A final rearguard of Virginians followed 100 yards behind the wagon train. The rest of the rank and file marched by twos on each side of the road, while the cannon, limbers, and wagons occupied the road itself. The following diagram depicts the order of battle of Braddock's forces.¹²



Braddock's arrangement of his formation, while appearing logical, proved tactically fatal for effective command and control. The wagons on the narrow trail bisected the companies. The significance of this meant that no single unit could bring volley fire upon the attacking enemy. If fighting proved necessary, this arrangement required soldiers to climb over or run around the ends of the wagon train to form a single company front. The terrain revealed no areas existed with sufficient space for the companies to execute the precision linear tactics that they drilled

¹² <http://www.britishbattles.com/braddock.htm>. Patrick MacKellar map accessed 29 October 2008.

while in garrison.¹³ As Braddock's exhausted force approached, the French prepared to attack. Braddock either negligently or foolishly arrayed his forces in a manner that elemented a basic premise of British tactics. That units remain as single entities in order to fire as a single unit or by subsequent platoons. The arrangement of this column ensured the mitigation of a core strength of eighteenth-century British military prowess

The Battle Of The Monongahela

Disastrously, Braddock's leadership as a field commander did not match his capabilities as a garrison organizer and administrator. The French sighted Braddock's lead column just ten miles from Fort Duquesne on 9 July 1755. The column crossed with flags flying and drums beating. They intended to warn and intimidate the French. In a final act to disrupt the British advance, Captain Daniel-Hyacinthe de Beaujeau determined to attempt one more assault.

The meeting engagement occurred where the path inclined through the woods to an opening that curved to the right. This curve formed part of a small hill that provided a perfect point from which to fire into the column. Between the road and the hill, a natural trench existed which obscured the French from view.¹⁴ The grenadier company, as it turned on the path, ran directly into the French and Indian contingent. The vanguard halted, formed, and fired a volley. The stunned French and Indian formation hesitated and began to scatter into the woods. The British achieved success in their initial volley. The vanguard under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage killed the French commander Captain Beaujeu. At this point, the French attack came close to falling apart. Only French resolve and Captain Jean Daniel Dumas's ability to quickly rally

¹³ Stanley Pargellis, "Braddock's Defeat." *The American Historical Review*, American Historical Association XXXXI, no. 2 (January 1936): 255. Clearly, the wagons needed to use the road. The tactical drill of the time necessitated that each member of a company knew his place. By allowing the wagons to split the companies in two, with a platoon on each side of the road, no single company – other than the vanguard and rearguard could provide a sufficient front needed to volley fire.

¹⁴ Pargellis, "Braddock's Defeat," 259.

the Indians and return fire upon the British prevented the attack from failing.

The French, who followed a less-regimented system of tactical engagement in their possessions of New France, maintained another advantage. Before the battle, they prioritized their target selection. British officers on horseback became prime targets for the Indians and French Canadians. The casualty figures from the battle bear witness to this decision. The officers of Braddock's force suffered 73% killed and wounded, or 63 of the 86 officers present fell because of French and Indian marksmanship. Additionally, the French negated any British advantage of massing volley fire by using dispersion and the cover offered by the woods along the road. The British regulars and militia suffered 914 killed or wounded of the 1400 troops that fought at the Monongahela River.¹⁵

General Braddock ordered the main body forward to move to the assistance of the vanguard. The vanguard retreated toward the main body, formed and fired again. Both of these decisions observed in isolation seem logical and appropriate. However, it resulted in the two forces colliding in confusion along the narrow path. The situation continued to deteriorate. Unlike the French, Braddock made no prior planning concerning contingency situations. Braddock maintained security to the front, rear, and flanks of his formation. Unfortunately, each responded exactly as they had trained. When they received fire, they fell back to the column. These decisions, instead of improving the tactical situation and increasing British firepower, served to increase the level of confusion due to the constricted space.

The Anglo-American force received increased and more precise fire from the French and

¹⁵ Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc, 2002), 41-2.

Indians from three sides.¹⁶ Despite the smoke and the mounting anxiety of the mingling troops, the British began a fighting retreat in good order. This discipline did not last long. The collapse of the flank guards and the forward rush of troops following Braddock left the wagons and artillery pieces at the rear of the column lightly defended. The thickening smoke and the mounting casualties, especially among the Anglo-American officers, meant that the decisive point of the battle would arrive shortly.

Braddock's force then received fire from all sides. He realized that the only way out of the trap was forward. Escape meant clearing the ridge to the right of the path. George Washington, serving as Braddock's Aide de Camp, attempted to organize an assault party for that objective. Braddock continued to direct fire into the woods to the left of the column. This maneuver would suppress the enemy to his front left pinning them behind the trees while simultaneously attempting to rally his men to charge the rise on the right.

A bayonet charge in almost any direction by the British force would have turned the battle. The Indians, who disliked European methods of fighting, feared the British and their bayonets even more than facing musket fire. Braddock's hyper-centralized control of the force probably eliminated any individual initiative by the surviving officers. Without orders to do anything else, they stood clustered together firing ineffective volleys into the tree line. While mounting his fifth horse of the battle, Braddock suffered a shot through the arm that lodged in his chest.¹⁷ The immediate impact proved decisive. The force disintegrated.

¹⁶ Thomsen, "Baptism of Fire," 55. The French Canadians employed a lighter and smaller caliber musket. Their marksmanship and steady rate of fire (five rounds per minute) gave the French a significant advantage in achieving their goal of killing the officers.

¹⁷ Chartrand, *Monongehela, 1754-1755*, 73. When the intensity of the fighting increased, the militia companies abandoned the linear formations that the British attempted to form. The colonists began to fight much like the French and Indians among the trees. This led to an undetermined number of Anglo-American casualties from fratricide as they crossed the front of British sections firing blind volleys into the woods.

Washington, one of the few unwounded officers, acted uncharacteristically for a member of this army. Because of his prior service in frontier conflicts, he recognized the futility of continuing Braddock's design. On his own initiative, he ordered Braddock placed in a covered wagon along with his two other wounded aides. He then organized a rear guard that fought its way back to the Monongahela River. The French and Indians swarmed the remnants of Braddock's column. They seized the guns, and wagons, and killed and scalped the wounded. The survivors scrambled to cross the river. The survivors trampled and killed more of their comrades in the process.

Conclusion

Core leadership competencies of leading, developing, and achieving sets the foundation for effective leaders. But through the study of leaders such as Braddock, it is not just the steady application of clearly defined and easily understood leadership concepts that ensures success. An effective leader retains the underpinning competencies and synthesizes them with factors from multiple outside sources. An effective leader prudently evaluates the best way to modify and employ contemporary fighting techniques. Different environments dictate that tactics adjust, but that does not mean abandoning accepted fundamentals. Braddock did not find that balance and his army suffered for it. As long as our military remains engaged against a dynamic and thinking enemy, we must remain flexible but tethered to our central leadership competencies to avoid a similar fate.

Braddock's decades of training in the British army and service in Europe blended with his forceful character to create an inflexible personality. When faced with the necessity to change, he refused. He could not objectively separate his own feelings of superiority to consider alternatives or advice from others. He clung instead to methods that did not meet the immediate

and dire needs of his soldiers.

Beyond the battlefield, the poor handling of relations by General Braddock among the colonials and the Indians spurred the American colonists to seek another system and means to provide for their essential well being. Twenty years later, the colonists formed a new model of leadership that could fill that void.

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