



## America's Elite: US Special Forces from the American Revolution to the Present Day (General Military)

By Chris McNab

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From Roger's Rangers to the Revolution, Civil War, World War I & II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Bin Laden raid, this book covers over 250 years of American Special Forces action. America's Elite takes the reader through some of the most dramatic special forces operations in US history, from sniping British commanders during the Revolutionary War to Riverine incursions in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, and from demolition missions on D-Day to the SEAL assault on Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011. Training and selection procedures are explained in detail, and the book also describes some of the technologies that have separated regular soldiers from their Special Forces counterparts. Illustrated throughout with striking photography and artworks, America's Elite forms the most comprehensive and visually impressive single-volume guide to US Special Forces available.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“This book is a great overview of the men and women that make up the most elite warriors of our time. The operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Granada and Pakistan show how our nation depends on these people to be our first and most formidable line of human defense and offense in a dangerous world. Lastly the author tells of the raid on Bin Laden's hideout where SEAL Team 6 brings that terrorist to justice.” *The San Francisco Book Review (July 22, 2013)*

“Here is a complete survey of how the US Army, Navy, and Air Force developed and used the concept of elite soldiers, considering key operations, training, and technology that separates them from regular soldiers. The combination of striking artworks and in-depth history makes this a 'must' for any military holding.” *The Midwest Book Review (July 2013)*

#### About the Author

Chris McNab is an author and editor. To date he has published over 25 books, including *Twentieth Century Small Arms* (2001), *Gunfighters -The Outlaws and their weapons* (2005, contributing editor), *The Personal Security Handbook* (2003), *The Encyclopedia of Combat Techniques* (2002) and *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War* (2000). He is the co-author of *Tools of Violence* (2008) and has recently completed *Hitler's Armies* (2011), both for Osprey. Chris has also written extensively for major encyclopedia series, including *African-American Biographies* (2006), *USA 1950s* (2006), and *Reformation, Exploration and Empire* (2005), and has contributed to *The Times* on the war in Iraq. The author lives in Great Britain.

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#### **Colonial and Civil War Warriors**

The British North American Colonies evolved in the face of hostile fortune from the first settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts in the early 17th century. The development and success of the various colonies set up along the North Atlantic coastline was truly extraordinary. Within a few decades, after usually difficult beginnings, the population and wealth of the communities grew rapidly. Some of the small coastal settlements grew into important port cities such as Boston, New York (originally founded by the Dutch), Baltimore, and Philadelphia. By the middle of the 18th century the colonial populations of European origin were reckoned to total over a million and a half souls.

Unlike those implanted by other European powers, the early settlers of these English colonies in North America were often refugees from their own native land, usually for religious reasons. They were soon joined in the New World by individuals from all walks of life who were seeking a better future than they could hope for in Europe. Thus, for example, the Puritans in Massachusetts and the Quakers in Pennsylvania were eventually outnumbered by later immigrants inspired by more material motives; but the special character of the first settlements was never quite lost, and continued to be influential in the social and political lives of these colonies. The settlers in Virginia and further to the south were not as rigid in their religious beliefs, being for the most part adventurers who wished to establish rich plantation domains; they were especially successful in Virginia and South Carolina.

The colonies were not established without many struggles – first against the Indians, who periodically resisted the arrival of the settlers by waging ferocious wars, and later against the Spanish in Florida to the south and especially against the French to the north and west. The Spanish remained somewhat contained in Florida and, while worrisome to the British settlers in the Carolinas and Georgia, did not constitute a major or consistent menace. The French were another matter. Due to their extensive explorations in the interior of North America, they had established colonies and outposts that formed an arc from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of the St Lawrence by the early 18th century. The French colonies were far smaller in population but were militarily very powerful, largely due to their many Indian alliances. They were governed by a largely autocratic and military authority; apart from regular garrisons they also had well-organized and well-led militias which became intimately familiar with long-range movement through the wilderness and with the tactics of woodlands warfare.

Here, if anywhere, lie the roots of the future development of US Special Forces. The soldiery of the emergent colonies was a varied tapestry of improvised and formalized units, a mix of regular and provincial militias, the latter of frequently uneven quality. Yet the challenges of fighting in the American wilderness meant that those who combined field craft with the ability to handle a musket and knife were soon in demand. One of the earliest formal expressions of such an ethos was the “Ranger,” especially those associated with a certain Robert Rogers.

## **THE RANGER WARRIOR**

Along the frontiers of the northern American colonies, where most of the battles of the French and Indian War (1754–63) took place, “Rangers” proved indispensable adjuncts to the main regular and provincial armies, both as partisan warriors and as scouts. They were essentially backwoodsmen – hunters, trappers, militiamen, and Indian fighters – used to operating independently rather than in regimented ranks of soldiery, living off the land and relying on their knowledge of terrain and gun to keep them alive. The very qualities that many commanders despised in the Rangers – field attire that often resembled that of “savage” Indians; unconventional tactics; their occasional obstreperousness; their democratic recruiting standards that allowed blacks and Indians into their ranks – are what helped make them uniquely adroit at fighting their formidable Canadian and Indian wilderness foes, in all kinds of weather conditions and environments.

Battles with Native American warriors in the early 17th century had demonstrated the virtual uselessness of European armor, pikes, cavalry, and maneuvers in the dense New World forests. Although New England militia units had proven themselves courageous and adaptable during the horrific baptism of fire with local tribes known as King Philip’s War (1676–77), it was not until the early 1700s that the colonists could produce frontiersmen capable of penetrating deep into uncharted Indian territory. In 1709, for instance, Captain Benjamin Wright took 14 Rangers on a 400-mile (640km) round trip by canoe, up the Connecticut River, across the Green Mountains, and to the northern end of Lake Champlain, along the way fighting four skirmishes with Indians.

The “Indian hunters” under Massachusetts’ Captain John Lovewell were among the most effective of the early Rangers. Their long, hard-fought battle at Lovewell’s Pond on May 9, 1725, against Pigwacket Abenakis under the bearskin-robed war chief Paugus, became a watershed event in New England frontier history. Its story was told around hearths and campfires for decades, and its example informed future Rangers that Indian warriors were not always invincible in the woods.

When the third war for control of North America broke out in 1744 (commonly called King George’s War, after George II), several veterans of Lovewell’s fight raised their own Ranger companies and passed on their valuable field knowledge. Among the recruits who joined one company assigned to scout the upper

Merrimack River valley around Rumford (later Concord), New Hampshire, was the teenager Robert Rogers. Incessant French and Indian inroads turned the war of 1744–48 into a largely defensive one for the northern colonies. Log stockades and blockhouses protected refugee frontier families; Rumford itself had 12 such “garrison houses.” When not on patrol or pursuing enemy raiders, Rangers acted as armed guards for workers in the field. Bells and cannon from the forts sounded warnings when the enemy was detected in the vicinity.

At the beginning of the last French and Indian War, each newly raised provincial regiment generally included one or two Ranger companies: men lightly dressed and equipped to serve as quick-reaction strike forces as well as scouts and intelligence gatherers. The Duke of Cumberland, Captain General of the British Army, not only encouraged their raising but also advised that some regular troops would have to reinvent themselves along Ranger lines before wilderness campaigns could be won.

Nevertheless, it was not until after the shocking 1757 fall of Fort William Henry that plans were finally accelerated to counterbalance the large numbers of Canadian and Indian partisans. Enlightened redcoat generals such as Brigadier George Augustus Howe, older brother of William, recognized that the forest war could not be won without Rangers. Howe was so firmly convinced of this that in 1758 he persuaded Major-General James Abercromby to revamp his entire army into the image of the Rangers, dress-wise, arms-wise, and drill-wise. Major-General Jeffrey Amherst, who would orchestrate the eventual conquest of Canada, championed Major Robert Rogers and the formation of a Ranger corps as soon as he became the new commander-in-chief in late 1758. “I shall always cheerfully receive Your opinion in relation to the Service you are Engaged in,” he promised Rogers. In the summer of 1759, Amherst’s faith in the Rangers was rewarded when, in the process of laying siege to Fort Carillon at Ticonderoga, they again proved themselves the only unit in the army sufficiently skilled to deal with the enemy’s bushfighters. Even the general’s vaunted Louisbourg light infantry received Amherst’s wrath after two night attacks by Indians had resulted in 18 of their number killed and wounded, mostly from friendly fire.

Before the year was out, Rogers had burned the Abenaki village of Odanak, on the distant St Francis River, its warriors the long-time scourge of the New England frontier. In 1760, after the Rangers had spearheaded the expulsion of French troops from the Richelieu River valley, Amherst sent Rogers and his men to carry the news of Montreal’s surrender to the French outposts lying nearly 1,000 miles (1,600km) to the west. He sent them because they were the only soldiers in his 17,000-man army able to accomplish the task.

Captain Robert Rogers’ Ranger corps became the primary model for the eventual transformation of the regular and provincial army in that region. Colonial irregulars aside from Rogers’ men also contributed to the success of British arms during the war: provincial units such as Israel Putnam’s Connecticut Rangers, companies of Stockbridge Mahican and Connecticut Mohegan Indians, Joseph Gorham’s and George Scott’s Nova Scotia Rangers, and home-based companies such as Captain Hezekiah Dunn’s, on the New Jersey frontier. During Pontiac’s War (1763–64), Ranger companies led by such captains as Thomas Cresap and James Smith mustered to defend Maryland and Pennsylvania border towns and valleys.

## **RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND ENLISTMENT**

Rogers’ Rangers, the most famous, active, and influential colonial partisan body of the French and Indian War, never enjoyed the long-term establishment of a British regular regiment, with its permanent officer cadre, nor were they classed as a regiment or a battalion as the annually raised provincial troops were. In fact, at its peak Rogers’ command was merely a collection, or corps, of short-term, independently raised Ranger companies. Technically, “Rogers’ Rangers” were the men serving in the single company he commanded. By courtesy, the title was extended to the other Ranger companies (excepting provincial units) with the Hudson valley/Lake George army, since he was the senior Ranger officer there.

Rogers first captained Ranger Company Number One of Colonel Joseph Blanchard's New Hampshire Regiment in the 1755 Lake George campaign. Thirty-two hardy souls volunteered to remain with him at Fort William Henry that winter to continue scouting and raiding the enemy forts in the north, despite the lack of bounty or salary money.

Near the beginning of the spring of 1756, reports of Rogers' success in the field prompted Massachusetts' Governor-General William Shirley (then temporary commander of British forces) to award him "the command of an independent company of Rangers," to consist of 60 privates, three sergeants, an ensign, and two lieutenants. Robert's brother, Richard, would be his first lieutenant. No longer on a provincial footing, Rogers' Rangers would be paid and fed out of the royal war chest and answerable to British commanders. Although not on a permanent establishment, Ranger officers would receive almost the same pay as redcoat officers, while Ranger privates would earn twice as much as their provincial counterparts, who were themselves paid higher wages than the regulars. (Captain Joseph Gorham's older Ranger company, based in Nova Scotia, enjoyed a royal commission, and thus a permanency denied those units serving in the Hudson valley.) Rogers was ordered by Shirley "to enlist none but such as were used to travelling and hunting, and in whose courage and fidelity I could confide."

Because the men of Rogers' own company, and of those additional companies his veteran officers were assigned to raise, were generally frontier-bred, the amount of basic training they had to undergo was not as protracted as that endured by the average redcoat recruit. A typical Derryfield farmer, for instance, would have entered the Ranger service as an already proficient tracker and hunter. He was probably able to construct a bark or brush lean-to in less than an hour, find direction in the darkest woods, make rope from the inner bark of certain trees, and survive for days on a scanty trail diet.

The typical New Hampshire recruit could also "shoot amazingly well," as Captain Henry Pringle of the 27th Foot observed. Based at Fort Edward and a volunteer in one of Rogers' biggest scouting excursions, Pringle wrote in December 1757 of one Ranger officer who, "the other day, at four shots with four balls, killed a brace of Deer, a Pheasant, and a pair of wild ducks – the latter he killed at one Shot." In fact, many New England troops, according to an eyewitness in Nova Scotia, could "load their firelocks upon their back, and then turn upon their bellies, and take aim at their enemies: there are no better marksmen in the world, for their whole delight is shooting at marks for wages."

The heavy emphasis on marksmanship in Rogers' corps, and the issuance of rifled carbines to many of the men, paid off in their frequent success against the Canadians and Indians. (Marksmanship remains among the most important of all Ranger legacies, one that continues to be stressed in the training of today's high-tech special forces.) Even in Rogers' only large-scale defeat, the battle on Snowshoes of March 13, 1758, the sharpshooting of his heavily outnumbered Rangers held off the encircling enemy for 90 minutes. Over two dozen Indians alone were killed and wounded, among the dead one of their war chiefs. This was an unusually high casualty rate for the stealthy Native Americans ("who are not accustomed to lose," said Montcalm of the battle). So enraged were the Indians that they summarily executed a like number of Rangers who had surrendered on the promise of good quarter.

Learning how to operate watercraft on the northern lakes and streams was another crucial skill for every Ranger. Birchbark canoes and bateaux (rowing vessels made for transporting goods) were used in Rogers' earliest forays on Lake George. In 1756, these were swapped for newly arrived whaleboats made of light cedar planking. Designed for speed, they had keels, round bottoms, and sharp ends, allowing for a quick change of direction and agile handling even on choppy waters. Blankets could be rigged as improvised sails.

Additional things the new recruit had to learn, or at least to perfect, included: how to build a raft; how to ford a rapid river without a raft or boat; how to portage a whaleboat over a mountain range; how to “log” a position in the forest as a makeshift breastwork; how to design and sew a pair of moccasins; how to utter bird and animal calls as “private signals” in the woods; and sometimes how to light and hurl a grenade.

## **Users Review**

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