

# A Rainbow Division Lieutenant in France: The World War I Diary of John H. Taber

Matthew J. Margis  
*Iowa State University*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2016 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

## Recommended Citation

Margis, Matthew J. "A Rainbow Division Lieutenant in France: The World War I Diary of John H. Taber." *The Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 278-279.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12315>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

ships with many Skunk Hill descendants, whose oral histories molded Birmingham's reverent account of their people. At times, his book seems unshaped by some recent developments in the field of Native American history. This is reflected in the thin bibliography. But engaging in nuanced debates with specialists is not Birmingham's goal; nor is he writing exclusively for a scholarly audience. Quite the opposite—*Skunk Hill* aims squarely at general readers, and its purpose is to wrap that place in a broader historical context. Throughout, Birmingham ably weaves the processes of removal and cultural and spiritual assaults that indigenous peoples endured in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into his discussion of Skunk Hill. Accordingly, this book will give novice readers a good sense of the overarching trajectory of Indian policy—not to mention a stellar example of an indigenous survival strategy—during this period.

Driven by a good story and filled with maps, photographs, and two excellent charts of the Skunk Hill census and the many allotments that shaped this community, *Skunk Hill* is a fun, respectful, and relevant contribution to the history of Native peoples in Wisconsin and the Midwest. It will undoubtedly be cited by specialists, prized by Skunk Hill descendants, and enjoyed by regional history enthusiasts.

On a final note, *Skunk Hill* has opened a few leads that Iowa historians could pursue fruitfully. According to the Iowa General Assembly's legislative record from 1858, a cohort of Potawatomes secured permission that March to reside in Iowa. Unlike the Meskwaki Nation—which received a similar authorization in 1856 and still resides on its settlement near Tama—the Potawatomes do not seem to have stuck around the Hawkeye state. Who were these Iowa Potawatomes, and did they have any connection with those who founded Skunk Hill four decades later? Additionally, a religious movement called “the Drum Society” was active on the Meskwaki settlement in the middle of the twentieth century and was discussed at some length by the “Fox Project” anthropologists who spent time there in the 1940s and 1950s. Was this another sect of the Skunk Hill Drum Dance? If so, did it make its way to Iowa from Wisconsin, or vice versa?

*Skunk Hill* offers a great deal to historians of the Midwest. Perhaps best of all, however, between its cracks an essay on Iowa's Potawatomi history lies in wait.

*A Rainbow Division Lieutenant in France: The World War I Diary of John H. Taber*, edited by Stephen H. Taber. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015. viii, 312 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Matthew J. Margis is a Ph.D. candidate in history at Iowa State University. He is working on a dissertation about the evolution of the National Guard during the Progressive Era.

John H. Taber's edited diary, *A Rainbow Division Lieutenant in France*, recounts his wartime experiences as a reserve officer attached to the 168th Infantry Regiment (Iowa National Guard) of the 42nd Infantry Division, also known as the Rainbow Division. Stephen Taber edited and transcribed his second cousin's wartime diary with few alterations, although he updated some of the antiquated language to appeal to a modern audience. He also chose to eliminate the daily date entries, which creates some confusion, though it does little to hinder the diary's flow. The editor did cross-reference the diary's information to ensure factual accuracy.

Overall, this diary serves as an interesting firsthand account. As a primary source, the book provides valuable insights into the mindset and day-to-day activities of an officer in the French trenches during World War I. Although Taber was not an Iowan, he did serve with an Iowa National Guard regiment, so this account of his experiences will appeal to anyone interested in Iowa's wartime history. In many ways, the book complements Hugh H. Thompson's transcribed diary, *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas: With the 42nd Rainbow Division in France*, edited by Robert H. Ferrell (2004), which also recounts the experiences of an army officer attached to the 168th Regiment. However, because this is a diary, anyone seeking an analytical account of World War I or life in the trenches will need to look elsewhere.

*American Organic: A Cultural History of Farming, Gardening, Shopping, and Eating*, by Robin O'Sullivan. CultureAmerica Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. 382 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is associate professor of anthropology at Creighton University and an Iowa resident. Her research and writing focus on, among other things, rural communities and sustainability.

Through a kaleidoscopic interdisciplinary lens, Robin O'Sullivan examines what is really on our plates when we decide to eat organic. Large, looming, complex, and interconnected issues are embedded in the individual question "what's for dinner" in America. This historical analysis of the American organic movement provides a new critical paradigm to tackle the complexity of what is at stake within organic farming, gardening, shopping, and eating decisions in terms of health, food justice, and environmental sustainability. O'Sullivan examines