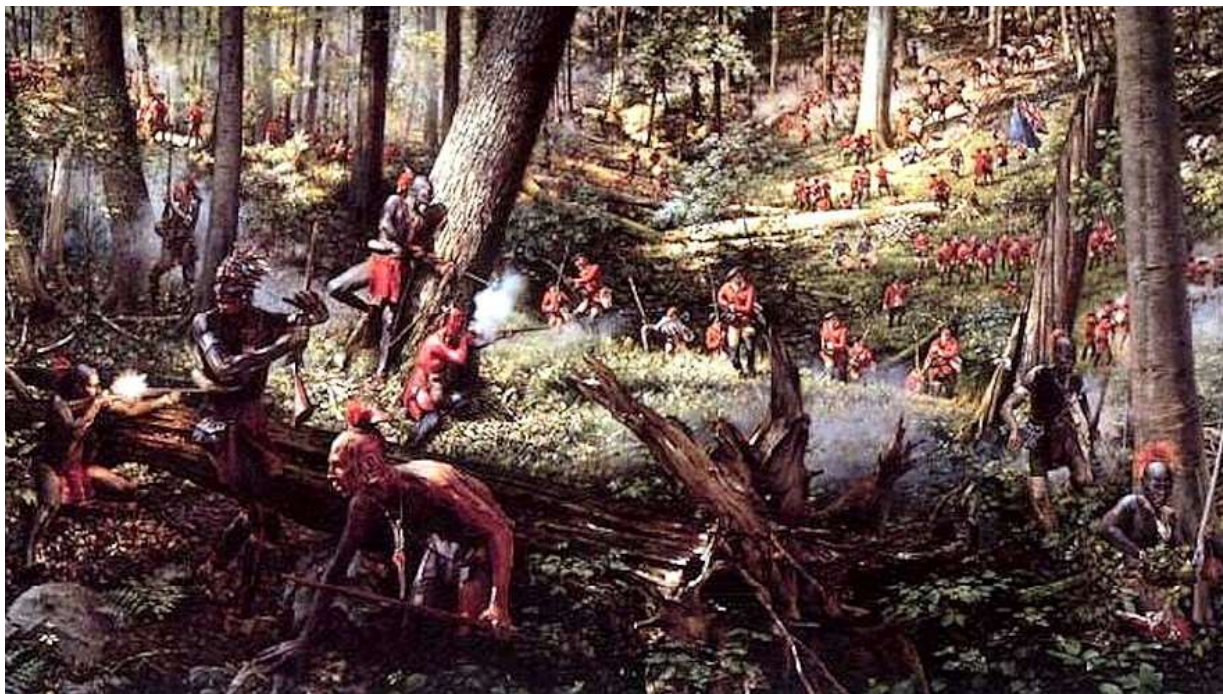


Settlement: George Washington's French And Indian War

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TOP: Native Americans ambush British Soldiers. SECOND: Portrait of Robert Dinwiddie. BOTTOM: The line of French forts in Pennsylvania in 1755 and the route taken by British Commander in Chief Edward Braddock toward Fort Duquesne during the French and Indian War. Depicted are the locations of Fort Duquesne, Fort Necessity, Fort Cumberland, Fort Presque Isle, Fort Leboeuf and and Fort Venango. Wikimedia Commons and Getty Images.

In the 1600s, the French had major settlements in Canada and parts of Maine. One was Acadia. The other was Quebec. The French colonies were called New France. The French hunted animals and French ships brought the furs back to France. The European population of New France grew steadily from 3,200 in 1666, to about 70,000 by 1750. But at the same time, the English population from Massachusetts down to the Carolinas grew to more than a million.

The French believed that they could link New France to their settlements in Louisiana and along the Mississippi. This would stop the English getting more control of North America. Eventually, England and France would go to war.

Settling the Ohio country

In 1747, George Washington's two half-brothers were interested in the fur trade and land development. They organized the Ohio Company of Virginia. The king of England gave them permission to get 200,000 acres near the Ohio River. Today, this is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The company agreed to settle at least 100 families there and build a fort for their protection.

In 1749, the French began sending troops and their Native American allies to attack the English. They wanted all the land around the Ohio River and the rivers that emptied into it.

In 1750, the Ohio Company began making a trail from Maryland through the mountains to start looking for the best land for the settlers. The trail was then widened for the wagons of the pioneers.

The French knew the English were coming. The French governor in Quebec ordered four forts to be built in the Ohio country.

Permission to go to war with French



Meanwhile, Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia knew what the French were doing. In June, Dinwiddie reported this to England. The king of England gave Virginia permission to battle the French. Dinwiddie sent a young Major George Washington to fight the French.

Washington hired a French translator, Jacob Van Braam, and a land surveyor named Christopher Gist, and they purchased horses and supplies and headed west. Rain and heavy snow slowed their progress. When they finally reached the Ohio River, Washington hired Half King, an important Seneca chief. He joined the group that would meet with the French.

On December 11, Washington presented a letter from Governor Dinwiddie to the French. It told them to leave. A few days later, Washington received a written response. They were not leaving.

Washington, Half King, Gist, Van Braam and the others left on December 16. Progress was slow. So Washington and Gist left the others to get the letter to Governor Dinwiddie more quickly. Native American attacks and ice-swollen rivers nearly killed them. They reached Maryland on January 6, 1754. From there, Washington continued alone. He arrived at Williamsburg, Virginia, on January 16.

Washington made second in command

Dinwiddie ordered Washington to form an army, promising land to those who signed up. Washington was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He was now second in command under Colonel Joshua Fry.

On April 2, 1754, Washington and his men left Alexandria, Virginia. On the 19th, he received a message. The English fort had been captured by the French. On April 23, Washington called a council of war. They decided to move toward the fort and wait for other soldiers to join them.

On May 24, a message from Half King warned them that the French were coming to fight them. On May 27, Gist reported from his small settlement that the French were five miles away. That evening, another message from Half King said he found the French. Washington took 40 men and joined up with the chief. In the early morning hours, they attacked the French camp. As many as a dozen Frenchmen were killed and 21 were taken prisoner. One English soldier was killed and three were wounded.

Washington sent reports to Colonel Fry and Governor Dinwiddie.

Fort Necessity needed more supplies and soldiers

Washington built a circular log fort, about 50 feet in diameter with a shallow trench around it. It was named Fort Necessity. On June 10, about 200 men, nine small cannons and a small amount of food arrived from Virginia.

Soon after, a company from South Carolina of about 100 men under Captain James Mckay arrived. This was good and bad. Mckay had brought a small herd of cattle, but his men began eating the fort's supply of food.

On June 15, Washington marched his men toward the Monongahela River nearly 30 miles away. He left Mckay and his men at Fort Necessity because Mckay refused to take orders from Washington. Their progress was slowed by the steep hills and rocky forests. On the 27th,

they had reached Gist's settlement. Washington sent one group ahead hoping to find corn. Later that same day, he got information that the French at Fort Duquesne now had 1,000 more men. He sent a message to Captain Mckay ordering him and his company to come join them.

The officers, including McKay, quickly met on the 28th. They agreed that they should not attack this large army and went back to Fort Necessity. They had little food left.



Washington surrenders at Fort Necessity

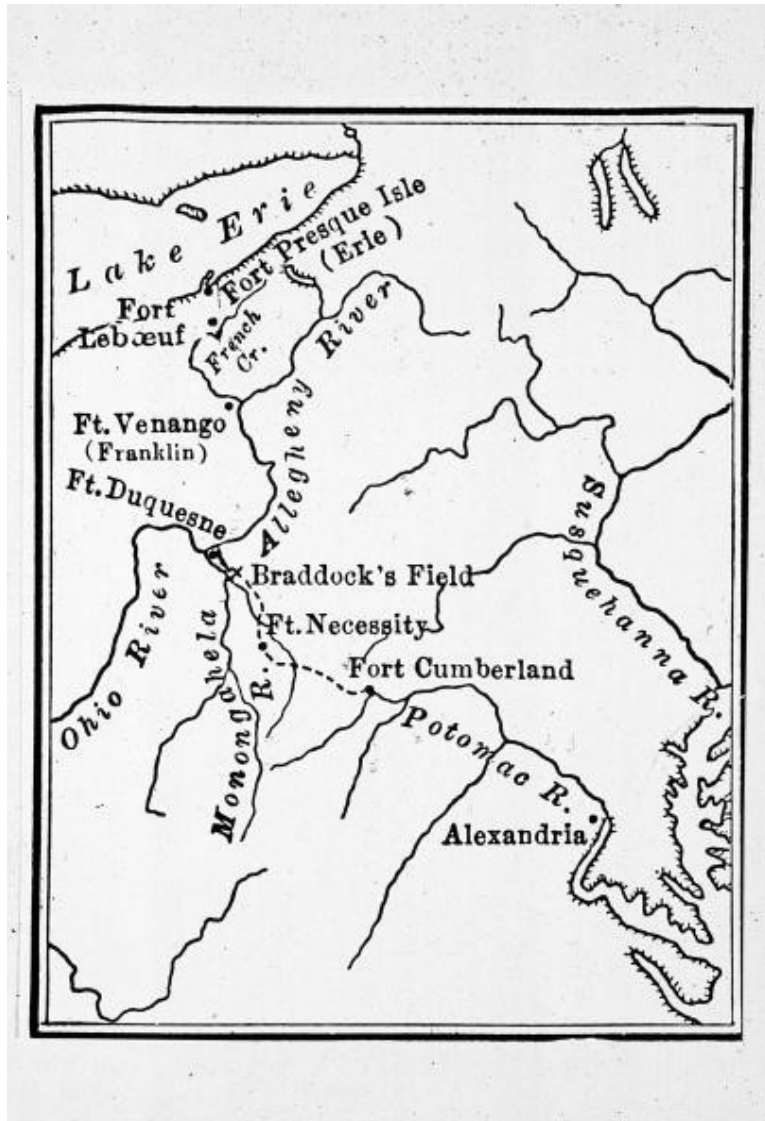
Washington put his men to work improving the fort. Late in the morning of July 3, a force of about 600 French and their 100 Native American allies appeared. The French were behind every tree. Washington moved his men back into the fort. The French and Native Americans started firing and Washington lost many men. Rain fell throughout the day and into the night. It was impossible to keep their weapons and gunpowder dry.

Captain Louis de Villiers was the leader of the French. Villiers called for a truce to talk about ending the fighting. His men exhausted and starving, Washington surrendered.

The English left Fort Necessity and the French burned the fort down.

Washington gets early practice as war hero

Washington and Mckay made their report to Dinwiddie and it was sent on to London. Back in England, it was reported that "the volley fired by a young Virginian in the backwoods of America set the world on fire." So in January 1755, Major General Edward Braddock and two Irish regiments set sail for North America to take Ohio country from the French.



When Braddock arrived, Washington volunteered to serve. In July 1755, the English were ambushed and General Braddock was killed. However, Washington helped save the soldiers and his bravery was celebrated at home and in England.

Still the English did not give up. In 1757, they sent Brigadier General John Forbes to North America to capture Fort Duquesne. Forbes spent months clearing a road. When he attacked on November 25, 1758, the French were outnumbered, so they burned their fort and retreated. Forbes rebuilt the fort, renaming it Fort Pitt. The surrounding area he called Pittsburgh.

Forbes recognized that Washington, who had returned to command the Virginia regiment in 1756, could be of useful service to him. Forbes made good use of the young colonel and Washington learned invaluable lessons on how an army should be organized, supplied and fought in North America.

Britain takes Canada from France

In February 1763, the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War. The French gave Canada to the English. In October, the king of England stopped settlements west of the Allegheny Mountains, and the next year started taxing the American colonies to help pay for the war costs. These taxes from the French and Indian War caused unrest in the colonies that would eventually lead to the American Revolution. It also marked Washington as a soldier and hero who would soon lead the Revolution against the British.

Theodore J. Crackel spent 21 years in the U.S. Army. He was also a professor at the University of Virginia.