

George Washington and His Other War

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When George Washington is mentioned in history it usually because of his accomplishments in the Revolutionary War by leading an army of civilians against the most significant military force the world had known up to that point, winning that war would prevail him to become the first president of the United States. Before Washington would lead these civilians against the British, he would fight in another war on behalf of the British and learn everything he needed to know to drive these men to defeat the British. The French and Indian war for Washington would mark a pivotal moment in his life and what is widely unknown is how the history of the United States may have changed in this war.

George Washington was born February 22, 1732, in Virginia. His father was Augustine Washington, and his mother was Mary Ball.¹ Washington went to school in Fredericksburg where he learns how to read and write. At the age of sixteen, Washington was ordered by Lord Fairfax to go on a surveying expedition past the Blue Ridge Mountains to survey the lands that Lord Fairfax had planned on settling.² Though he was not paid for this expedition, the experience in the Ohio Valley would become extremely handy to him in the years to come. Virginians who traveled past the Blue Ridge Mountains would come across the five nations of the Iroquois, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas³ on this expedition, Washington would encounter his first taste of Native Americans, but it would not be his last.

By early 1753, tensions in the Ohio Valley had begun heating up. The French and British both had claimed lands belonging to them in the Valley. The French had built forts at the forks of the Ohio River, and in October 1753 they traveled with 200 canoes down the river to build their last fort in the system.⁴ Lieutenant Governor of Virginia Robert Dinwiddie was ordered by the

¹ Charles Ambler, *George Washington and The West* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), 3

² *George Washington and The West*, 18

³ Colin Calloway, *The Indian World of George Washington* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 31

⁴ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 65

crown to send correspondence to the French demanding them to stop building forts and to take back their claims to the Ohio Valley. All he needed was a messenger. Washington offered his services to Dinwiddie. Washington had become well accustomed to the Ohio Valley by now due to at least four trips where he had surveyed the land. On October 31, 1753, Washington left Williamsburg. Dinwiddie had instructed him to travel to Logstown to meet with some Native American chiefs such as Tanaghrisson and Scarouady and ask them for warriors to travel with him to meet the French. After he met with Scarouady, Washington would call him “a great friend to the English.”⁵ With his guides and scouts, Washington traveled to Fort Le Boeuf where he met with Legardeur de St. Pierre. St. Pierre told Washington that he would have to travel into Canada to meet with Marquiss Duguisne, The French Governor of New France to discuss this proposition. In a letter back to Dinwiddie, St. Pierre says:

I should have been glad that you had given him Orders, or that he had been inclined to proceed to Canada, to see our General, to whom it better belongs than to me to set forth the Evidence and Reality of the Rights of the King, my Master, upon the Lands situated along the River Ohio, and to contest the Pretensions of the King of Great-Britain thereto. I shall transmit your Letter to the Marquiss Duguisne ; his Answer will be a Law to me, and if he shall order me to communicate it to you, Sir, you may be assured I shall not fail to dispatch it to you forthwith.⁶

Dinwiddie was not ready to wait around.

The French had been warned to stop their advance into the Ohio Valley, but it did not matter. Dinwiddie sent Washington back out. With help from Tanaghrisson, Washington surrounded a French battalion lead by Jumonville, which would later become known as The Battle of Jumonville Glen. Jumonville was killed, but the battle that lasted fifteen minutes is

⁵ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 62

⁶ “The Journal of Major George Washington (1754),” University of Nebraska-Lincoln Digital Commons, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=etas>

debated. Washington's forces captured most of his soldiers. This battle started the French and Indian War on May 28, 1754. Washington's importance to this war was just beginning.

Fearing the French would counter-attack, Washington constructed a fort in the southern portion of present-day Fayette County, Pennsylvania. Washington had no idea about building forts. Fort Necessity was an example of this. It was in a lower part of a valley overlooked by mountains and forest. It could easily be attacked, but Washington said: "it could withstand a 500-man attack."⁷ Washington had received word that the French were on the move towards him. Captain Louis Coulon De Villiers marched towards Fort Necessity with around 130 soldiers and Native Americans. Villiers was the brother of Jumonville, so this was personal to him. On July 3, 1754, Villiers reached the fort. He ordered his men to surround the fort and apply gunfire from all around. Washington knew his only shot was to attack directly at the French. With the help from some British regulars, Native Americans and Virginia militia, they charged directly at them. Villiers ordered his army to charge directly at Washington as well. The British Regulars and Native Americans listened to Washington's Orders, who was now Colonel Washington and in charge of the Virginia Regiment after Joshua Fry fell off his horse and died,⁸ but the Virginia militia did not. They ran back into the fort and Villiers ordered his men to attack them which meant Washington had to fall back to the fort. Once inside the fort, Washington's men had a hard time firing on the French due to wet conditions. The gunpowder was wet and would not fire, also the French were elevated in the woods, so the shots that they got off were not hitting anything. The French suffered very few casualties. Washington knew he must surrender.

The French sent a soldier to negotiate the surrender, but Washington did not want them to enter the fort. He sent a soldier and translator to meet them. Villiers wanted to end this quick

⁷ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 91

⁸ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 92

because he feared that British reinforcements were heading towards the fort. Villiers attacked mainly to avenge his brother's death and had no intention of taking the British captives, but the same could not be said about the Native Americans that were fighting on the French side. What would become a common theme in this war, Native Americans believed they were entitled to the spoils of war. Villiers soldier told Washington's that if they did not surrender now that the French could not promise that the Native Americans would not come in the fort and scalp everyone. Washington agreed to terms which read in French that Jumonville's murder had been an "assignation."⁹ On July 4, 1754, Washington surrendered the fort to the French. The Native Americans began looting the fort immediately. Washington had no intention to stop them.

Washington and his troops arrived back to Fort Cumberland in Virginia. After the defeat, Scarouady and his people left Logstown in fear of the French coming and attacking there as well. Washington knew he would be punished for his poor performance at Fort Necessity, but the Virginia House of Burgesses commended Washington on his courage and blamed the defeat on not having enough supplies for him and his men. He had his first experience in battle. It may not have gone the way he planned, but it would not be his last chance and not his best showing of the type of commander he could be.

In March 1775, General Edward Braddock arrived in the American Colonies. Dinwiddie had promised Braddock of a grand army once he arrived. Would Braddock would have once he got here was anything but grand. He saw a fighting force with little training and absolutely no discipline. Braddock would have to train these soldiers up before he attempted his great expedition. Money promised to Braddock was another problem he had. Many of the colonies had very little money, and he had to go to each colonies assembly to get money for his expedition. His plan was set up it three parts. He wanted to take the forts that French controlled along the

⁹ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 95

forks of the Ohio Valley. Then take control of Crown Point and finally take Fort Duquesne. Braddock brought over Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage, who twenty years later would be at the battle of Lexington and Concord on the British side. He also Lieutenant Colonel Horatio Gates, who would later also fight in the Revolutionary War, but on the side of the United States and would defeat a British Regiment at Saratoga. Washington saw this expedition as a chance to redeem himself for his failures at Fort Necessity.

Part of the treaty Washington signed at the Fort Necessity was that he would not go back to the Ohio Valley for at least a year, but he did not care. He knew he had to do this, but he also knew that he would have to do it voluntarily because, after his performance at Fort Necessity, there was no chance of advancement or a commission in the British Regular army. He wrote to William Byrd III that he had no other goal than “serving my country without fee and reward.”¹⁰ Washington had been given land by his brother Jack near the forks of the Ohio River in the Ohio Valley, so securing that land to him meant more than most people.

He set out to meet up with Braddock. Braddock would take the same route that Washington took some years later when he was heading to Fort Duquesne but stopped and built Fort Necessity. Once Washington arrived at Fort Cumberland, Braddock ordered him to go to Hampton to raise money for the expedition, but while he was gone, he stopped at Mount Vernon and checked on his estate as well as buy materials for himself. By the time he returned, Braddock was ready to march. Braddock would rely on Washington from his years of experience in surveying and also his memory of the road they would take from a few years ago.

As Braddock lead his army through the woods, he decided on June 17 to split his army into two units. He pushed ahead with eight hundred troops and artillery while Colonel Thomas

¹⁰ Marion Tining, *The Correspondence of The Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia 1684-1776*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 2

Dunbar would follow behind with troops and supplies, historians argue that this would lead to the downfall that was coming.¹¹ And they were approaching the Monongahela River. On July They crossed unopposed, but as soon as they did, they began running into Regular British soldiers. Soon Thomas Gage reported to Braddock that he and his company had run into a French Regiment led by Captain Daniel Lenard de Beaujeu.¹² Beaujeu had left Fort Duquesne with around 250 French soldiers and 650 Native Americans.¹³ Gage reported to Braddock that in the first fire of the battle, Beaujeu was killed. Before Braddock could set any time of a counter strike up, he and the British army came under heavy fire and were forced to hide in the woods near the river. The British held their ground for nearly three hours before their front began to collapse and soldiers started to fall back. Among those was a young Daniel Boone. Even in defeat, Washington showed his honor and bravery to the Crown. He helped a wounded Braddock back out of the front. At Braddock's orders, Washington rode back to tell Colonel Dunbar to come forward with food and supplies. Braddock would not survive this battle. On July 13, 1755, General Braddock took his last breath and died. Washington along with help from other commanders of the British army buried him on the road that Washington had marched year earlier on the way to Fort Duquesne. Soldiers marched over the grave to help conceal it from Native Americans who were fighting on the French side. Washington would always admire Braddock. He took one of pistol and sashes that he wore. He would later write that Braddock was "brave even to a fault and in regular Service would have done honor to his profession."¹⁴

The idea that the British were invincible died at the Monongahela. The French had shown that the British could be defeated. The Virginia militia, on the other hand, spread the myth that

¹¹ *Indian World of Washington*, 109

¹² Edward Lengel, *General George Washington*, (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2005), 57

¹³ *Indian World of George Washington*, 110

¹⁴ *Indian World of George Washington*, 112

they outperformed the British and this propaganda would help support the cause for the Revolutionary War. For Washington, he had been part of another defeat at the hands of the French. For Washington, he saw himself as a failure once again. This battle though could be blamed on Braddock in every way. Braddock would travel in style. He would always have luxury items with him constantly, the amount of baggage he had slowed down his movement and advance. Also, he refused to listen to his commanders about splitting the army up. He was confident that he would be able to lead the army if attacked even if they were half of what they should have been. When the French and the Native American attacked Braddock's army, many of the British regulars did not listen to Braddock, and they fled back. The Virginia company on the other hand stood and fought, which is why they had success against them. Over 900 British soldiers were killed or wounded during the battle, but Washington rode directly into the fire and reestablished the British forces to hold the French up just a little longer. Dinwiddie would call him the "hero at Monongahela."¹⁵ Washington thought he had proven his worth to the Crown, what would happen next would alter not only the history of the United States but also the world.

With Braddock being dead, Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor William Shirley was in charge of the British army now. Washington had thought he had proven enough in his two years of service to the crown to be able to earn an officer's commission in the British army. He traveled to Boston to meet with William Shirley to discuss this. Shirley decided not to grant Washington a commission, and many historians wonder if Shirley had given him this commission if he would have fought on the British side during the Revolutionary War. No one can be certain of what the outcome would have been, but many believe that he would have from

¹⁵ "Ten Facts About George Washington and the French and Indian War," George Washington: Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/french-indian-war/ten-facts-about-george-washington-and-the-french-indian-war/>

there who knows what the world would look like today. Shirley did grant Washington to be the leader of the Virginia Regiment of the militia.¹⁶

Washington's time in the war effort had but come to an end. As leader of the Virginia militia, he drilled his men and practice routines that he was taught in the British army. This made Washington a more mature leader and a better man. Having to lead the Virginia regiment also gave him his first taste in politics. Being in charge of the regiment meant that Washington had to handle all aspects of the regiments. That meant he had to raise fund for things like uniforms, weapons, food, and powder. Washington had trained his men to be as sharp of a soldier they could be, but they had yet to see in action. That would change in 1758.

After dealing with dysentery, Washington would now have to battle Native American raids that were happening in Ohio. A letter had arrived from Prime Minister William Pitt stating that he wanted to attempt a three-prong attack on French forces. Major General Jeffery Amherst would head towards Louisburg, Major General James Abercromby and Brigadier General George Howe would try to attack Fort Ticonderoga along the Hudson River, and finally, Brigadier General John Forbes tries to target Fort Duquesne. Washington and the Virginia regiment were assigned to be under the command of Forbes. Forbes plan was to construct a road from Shippensburg to Raystown, then move slowly westward through the forest of Pennsylvania and build small supply forts on the way that way once they arrived at For Duquesne, they would have supplies nearby.¹⁷ Washington's experience helped Forbes on the way to Duquesne, even though Forbes did not want to listen to Washington, he knew he had no better option. The French forces had surrounded Duquesne and on November 23, 1758, marched on it only to find that the French had set it on fire. Historians can only imagine how this made Washington feel. He took

¹⁶ Mount Vernon, "Ten Facts"

¹⁷ *General George Washington*, 71

the road of Braddock's defeat only to find the fort burned to the ground. Washington would then retire from the Virginia Regiment and live sixteen years of peace at his Mount Vernon estate.

George Washington is remembered as one of the greatest leaders ever to live. His experience during the French and Indian War helped in his leadership during the Revolutionary War. All Washington wanted was to be recognized for his efforts by the crown. Had he received a commission from the British, the United States may still be in control of the British. Washington's first war experience was not his best, but it taught him the lessons that he needed to become a great leader. Writing to Adam Stephen in 1776 Washington said that the anniversaries of July 3 and 9 passes "without a grateful remembrance of the escape we had at the Meadows and on the Monongahela."¹⁸ This war shaped him into the man that history remembers today.

Word count- 3049

¹⁸ *The Indian World of George Washington*, 168

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