

# Fort Necessity

National Battlefield  
Pennsylvania  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Official Map and Guide



Larry Olsen

Rival claims between the French and English to the vast territory along the Ohio River between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River approached a climax about 1750. The Ohio Company (organized in 1748 by a group of prominent Englishmen and Virginians who saw the economic and financial potential of the area) had obtained a large grant of 200,000 acres in the upper Ohio River Valley. From its post at Wills Creek, now Cumberland, Md., the Company planned additional settlements and started to open an 80-mile wagon road to the Monongahela River.

Meanwhile, the French, who considered the Ohio a vital link between New France (Canada) and Louisiana, advanced southward and westward from Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario, driving out English traders and claiming the Ohio River Valley for France. In 1753, Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia learned the French had built Fort Presque Isle near

Lake Erie and Fort Le Boeuf in that part of the Ohio country claimed by Virginia. He sent an eight-man expedition under George Washington to warn the French to withdraw. Washington, then only 21 years old, made the journey in midwinter of 1753-54. The French refusal to withdraw set the stage for the events that took place at Fort Necessity.

The confrontation at Fort Necessity in the summer of 1754 was the opening battle of the war fought by England and France for control of the North American continent. It was also the opening episode of a worldwide struggle known in North America as the French and Indian War and elsewhere as the Seven Years' War. It ended in 1763 with the expulsion of French power from North America and India. The action at Fort Necessity was also the first major event in the military career of George Washington, and it marked the only time he ever surrendered to an enemy.

## "A Charming Field For An Encounter"

In January 1754, even before he learned of the French refusal to abandon the Ohio Valley, Governor Dinwiddie sent a small force of Virginia soldiers to build a fort at the forks of the Ohio, where Pittsburgh now stands. The stockade was barely finished when a French force drove off the Virginians and built a larger fort on the site. The French called it Fort Duquesne in honor of the Marquis de Duquesne, who had recently become governor of New France.

In early April, George Washington, newly commissioned lieutenant colonel, started westward from Alexandria with part of a regiment of Virginia frontiersmen to build a road to Redstone Creek on the Monongahela. He was then to help defend the English fort on the Ohio. When told the fort was in French hands, he resolved to push on to Redstone Creek and await further instructions. His force was well beyond Wills Creek when Col. Joshua Fry, commanding the expedition, arrived there with the rest of the Virginia Regiment near the end of May. (When Fry died at Wills Creek on May 31, Washington assumed command of the regiment and was promoted to colonel.)

Washington arrived at the Great Meadows, as the Fort Necessity area was then called, on May 24. Although the meadow was nearly all marsh, he believed it "a charming field for an encounter" and ordered his men to set up an encampment. Three days later, after hearing that a group of French soldiers had been spotted about seven miles away

on Chestnut Ridge, Washington and 40 men set out to find them. At dawn on May 28, the Virginians reached the camp of Tanacharison, a friendly Seneca chief known as the Half King. His scouts then led them to the ravine about two miles to the north where the French were encamped.

The French, commanded by Joseph Coulon de Villiers, Sieur de Jumonville, were taken by surprise. Ten were killed, including Jumonville, one was wounded, and 21 were made prisoner. One man escaped to carry the news back to Fort Duquesne. Washington's command suffered only one man killed and two wounded.

Fearing "we might be attacked by considerable forces," Washington undertook to fortify his position at the Great Meadows. During the last two days of May and the first three days of June, he built a circular palisaded fort, which he called Fort Necessity.

This 1772 portrait of George Washington by Charles Willson Peale, above right, shows him in the Virginia militia colonel's uniform he wore as an aide-de-camp to General Braddock in 1755. Right: Private, Virginia Regiment, 1754.



Courtesy Washington & Lee University

## The Battle of Fort Necessity

The rest of the Virginia Regiment arrived at the Great Meadows on June 9, along with supplies and nine swivel guns. Washington's command now totaled 293 officers and men. He was reinforced several days later by about 100 men of Capt. James Mackay's Independent Company of regular British troops from South Carolina. Washington's attempts to retain his Indian allies were not successful.

While the South Carolinians remained at the Great Meadows, Washington and his Virginians spent most of June opening a road from Fort Necessity to Gist's Plantation, a frontier settlement in the direction of the forks of the Ohio. Reports that a large force of French and Indians was advancing from Fort Duquesne, however, caused him to withdraw his men to the Great Meadows, where they arrived July 1. The next day, they strengthened Fort Necessity by improving the

trenches outside the stockade. On the morning of July 3 a force of about 600 French and 100 Indians approached the fort. After the French took up positions in the woods, Washington withdrew his men to the entrenchments. Rain fell throughout the day, flooding the marshy ground. Both sides suffered casualties, but British losses were greater than French and Indian losses.

The fighting continued sporadically until about 8 p.m. Then Capt. Louis Coulon de Villiers, brother of Jumonville and commander of the French force, requested a truce to discuss the surrender of Washington's command. Near midnight, after several hours of negotiation, the terms were reduced to writing and signed by Washington and Mackay. The British were allowed to withdraw with the honors of war, retaining their bag-

gage and weapons, but having to surrender their swivel guns.

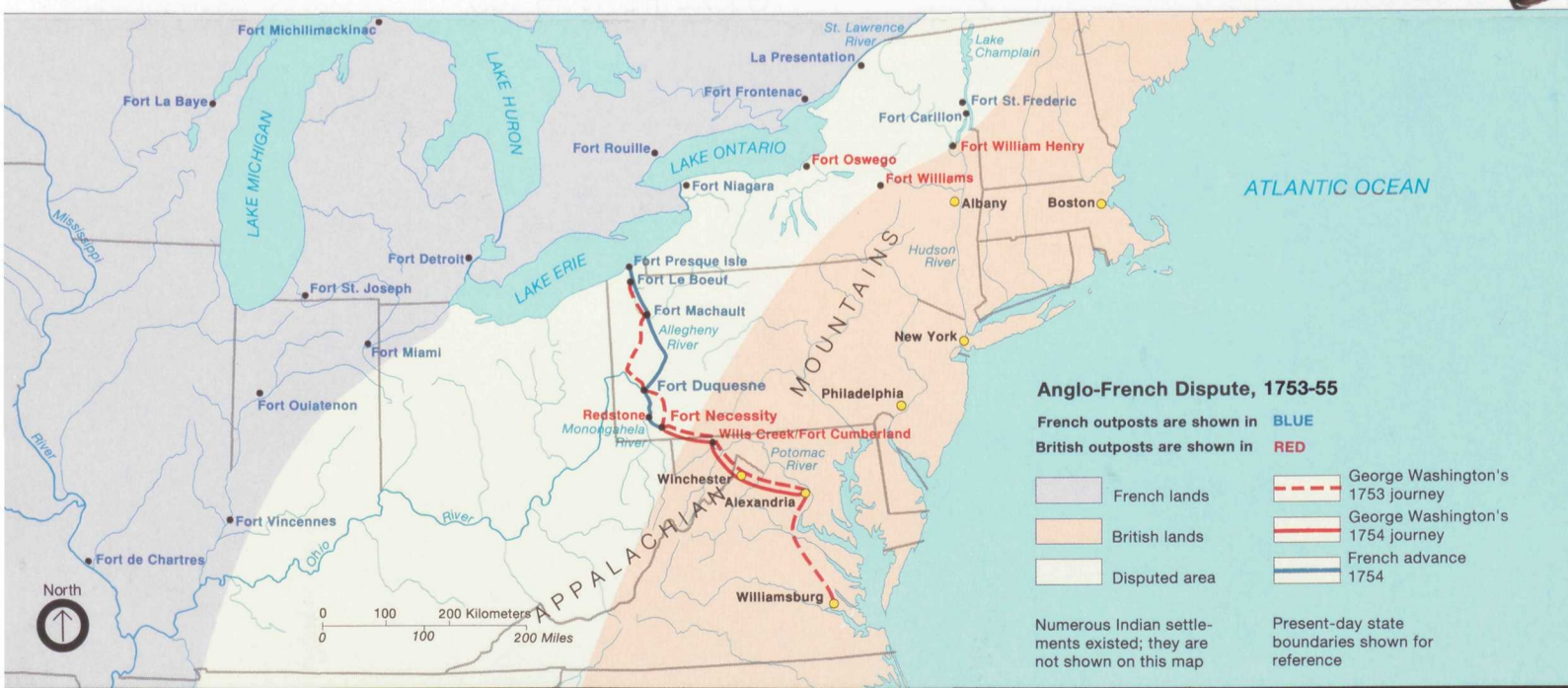
The British troops left Fort Necessity for Wills Creek on the morning of July 4. From there they marched back to Virginia. The French burned Fort Necessity and afterwards returned to Fort Duquesne.

Illustrations © Don Troiani

## Anglo-French Rivalry for the Ohio Valley

The fertile Ohio River Valley stretched nearly a thousand miles from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. England and France each believed this land belonged to them through discovery, exploration, early settlement, long-standing treaties, royal grants, and purchase from various Indian tribes. To the English, particularly the colonies of Pennsylvania and Virginia, as well as members of the Ohio Company, the Ohio country was a natural area for expansion by trade and settlement. The French saw it as an economic and defensive link between their colonies of Canada and Louisiana and as a barrier to English movements beyond the Appalachians. Both nations aggressively sought the goodwill and assistance of the Indian inhabitants through propaganda and presents distributed by traders and agents. The Indian's concept of land ownership conflicted with European values and culture, and this contributed to their claims to the territory being ignored or forgotten.

French officials, including the Marquis de Duquesne who became governor-general of New France in 1752, had used Indians like the Shawnee (right) to harass and hold back English attempts to trade or settle in the area. Other tribes, including many of the Iroquois Confederacy, assisted the English. Duquesne intensified the confrontation by sending detachments of "colony troops" (the *Compagnies Franches de la Marine*), far right, into the disputed area to occupy and fortify key points along the Ohio River and its tributaries. Although it would be another two years before England and France officially declared war on one another, Virginia Governor Dinwiddie's efforts to combat the French threat to the Ohio River Valley in 1753-54 led to the opening shots of a conflict that would "set the world on fire," determine which European nation would dominate North America, and change forever the Indians' way of life.



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The fatal wounding of General Braddock. From Edwin Deming's painting of the Battle of the Monongahela, 1755.

Courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin

*“This general 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 much self-confidence, too high an opinion of the validity of regular troops, and too mean a one of both Americans and Indians.”*

—Benjamin Franklin on General Braddock

## The Braddock Campaign

Following the encounter at Fort Necessity, the French hoped the English would no longer contest their claims to the Ohio country. But England refused to accept the unfavorable outcome of the battle as a conclusive test of her strength on the frontier and prepared to launch expeditions against the French strongholds of Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio; Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario; Fort St. Frederic (Crown Point) at the southern end of Lake Champlain; and Fort Beauséjour in Nova Scotia. The main attack, however, would be against Fort Duquesne.

The man appointed to head the Fort Duquesne expedition was 60-year-old Maj. Gen. Edward Braddock, an officer with 45 years of service in the British army, most of it with the Coldstream Guards. He had no experience, however, with wilderness fighting. Although his command, almost 2,400 men, seemed a formidable one, it consisted of two relatively new and undermanned infantry regiments—the 44th under Col. Sir Peter Halkett and the 48th under Col. Thomas Dunbar—augmented by colonial troops from

Virginia, New York, South Carolina, and Maryland, some of whom had taken part in the Fort Necessity campaign. Despite his usually low opinion of colonials, Braddock personally invited young George Washington to join his staff as an aide-de-camp.

Braddock began his march in April 1755. His orders were to proceed to Fort Cumberland, the Ohio Company's post at Wills Creek, thence northwest to the forks of the Ohio, all the while widening Washington's old road through the forest to accommodate artillery and baggage wagons. In mid-June, because the troops were moving too slow, Braddock divided his army, marching ahead with about 1,300 picked men and leaving the rest under Colonel Dunbar with orders to catch up as soon as they could. Braddock's detachment passed the Great Meadows and the ruins of Fort Necessity on June 25.

On the afternoon of July 9 Braddock's column was within eight miles of Fort Duquesne when it collided with about 600 French and Indians. When the battle ended,



Edward Braddock

Library of Congress

two-thirds of the British troops engaged and most of their officers were dead or wounded. Braddock himself was mortally wounded and died during the retreat. Fort Duquesne survived until November 1758, when the French destroyed it upon the approach of Gen. John Forbes' British army.

## The Park Today

Fort Necessity National Battlefield is 11 miles east of Uniontown, Pa., on U.S. 40. The park consists of three detached units: The main unit, which includes the battlefield, the reconstructed fort and earthworks, Mount Washington Tavern, and the visitor center; the Braddock Grave unit, one mile west on U.S. 40; and the Jumonville Glen unit, seven miles west along the crest of Chestnut Ridge. The park also contains traces of the Braddock Road, built by Washington and Braddock in 1754-55.



Mount Washington Tavern

Park grounds and the visitor center are open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Picnicking facilities are available from mid-spring through late fall. The park is closed on Christmas day.

We suggest you stop first at the visitor center where an audio-visual program and exhibits tell the story of the fort, the battle, and the archaeological study that led to the fort's reconstruction. Groups can receive special services if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

**Fort Necessity** The reconstructed fort occupies the site of the original fort and the palisades are in the exact location of the original stockade posts. The original stockade was circular in shape, measured 53 feet in diameter, and enclosed a small storehouse. The overall perimeter was 168 feet. The entrance, a gate located on the southwest sector of the stockade, was 3½ feet wide. The entrenchments outside the fort are reconstructions of those strengthened by Washington's men between their return to the fort on July 1 and the beginning of the French attack on July 3.

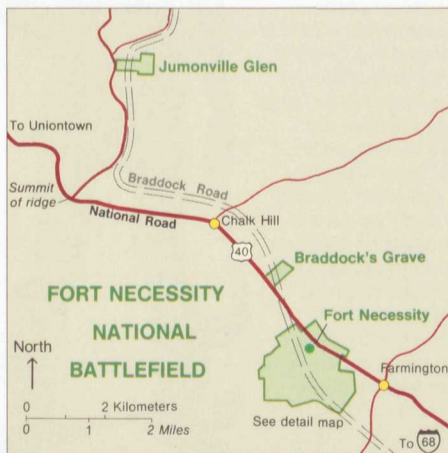
**Mount Washington Tavern** As the National Road was developed, many taverns were built along the route to serve as stopping places for stagecoaches. About 1827-28, Judge Nathaniel Ewing, then owner

of the Great Meadows tract once owned by George Washington, erected the large house that became Mount Washington Tavern. It was one of the first substantial buildings on the National Road between Grantsville and Uniontown. The tavern was primarily a stage stop and a welcome sight to travelers, offering lodging, meals, news, and refreshments. It now contains period furnishings in several rooms reflecting the building's use over the years. A Conestoga wagon, housed nearby, shows one of the typical modes of travel in the early 1800s.

**Braddock's Grave** When General Braddock died on July 13, 1755, from wounds re-

ceived in the Battle of the Monongahela, he was buried about one mile northwest of Fort Necessity in the middle of the road his troops had built. In 1804, while repairing this section of the Braddock Road, workmen came upon what is believed to be Braddock's remains. These were reinterred on the crest of a nearby knoll. Today a 12-foot-high granite monument marks the grave and commemorates General Braddock.

**Jumonville Glen** This secluded ravine was the scene of Washington's skirmish with the Sieur de Jumonville's small party of Frenchmen early on the morning of May 28, 1754. It was this event that brought the Colon de Villiers



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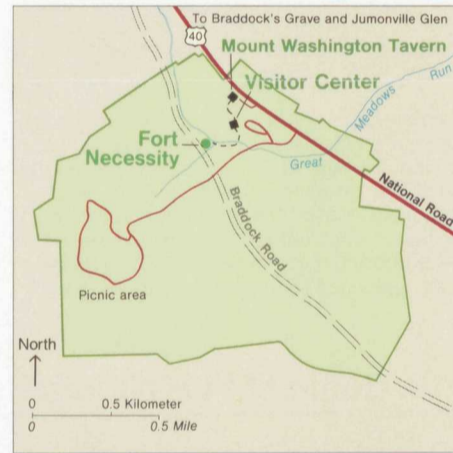
expedition from Fort Duquesne to the Great Meadows, culminating in the Battle of Fort Necessity. More than any other site in the park, Jumonville Glen evokes the isolated feeling of wilderness that characterized the Fort Necessity area in the 1750s and affords a unique opportunity to understand something of the effect this kind of terrain had on mid-18th century military tactics.

**Braddock Road** First blazed as a trail for the Ohio Company about 1750 by Nemacolin, a Delaware Indian, this road was built by Washington during the Fort Necessity Campaign in 1754 and improved by Braddock the next year. It extended from Wills Creek (Cumberland, Md.) to the Monongahela River (near present-day Pittsburgh) and subsequently became a highway of westward expansion. The Braddock Road was abandoned in 1818, when the National Road reached Wheeling.

**Related Sites** **Point State Park (Forks of the Ohio)**, Pittsburgh, is the site of Fort Prince George, built by Dinwiddie's Virginians in 1754; Fort Duquesne, constructed by the French that same year; and Fort Pitt, a huge star fort built by the British after Fort Duquesne was abandoned in 1758. An original blockhouse remains.

**Fort Ligonier**, Westmoreland County, served as a staging area for the 1758 Forbes Campaign, which resulted in the capture of Fort Duquesne. Following extensive archeological excavations, Fort Ligonier was reconstructed in 1954.

**Fort Bedford Park and Museum**, Bedford County, is located on the site of Fort Bedford, which served as a supply base for Gen. John Forbes' army during its march on Fort Duquesne. Like Forts Pitt and Ligonier, Fort Bedford was besieged during Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763.



**Administration** Fort Necessity National Battlefield and Friendship Hill National Historic Site are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. De-

partment of the Interior. Write: Superintendent, 1 Washington Parkway, Farmington, PA 15437-0001, or call 412-329-5512.



Friendship Hill National Historic Site

**Bushy Run Battlefield**, Westmoreland County, marks the site where Col. Henri Bouquet's small British army defeated Ottawa Chief Pontiac's confederation of Indian tribes in a two-day battle on August 5-6, 1763. This victory also ended a siege of Fort Pitt and marked the end of Pontiac's Rebellion.

**Friendship Hill National Historic Site** preserves the home of Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and an influential proponent of a National Road. The site is located in Fayette County, Pennsylvania,

about 20 miles west of Fort Necessity. The house and grounds are open daily, except December 25. A self-guiding audio tour is available for the historic sections of the house.

**For Safety's Sake** Because our trails are sometimes crowded, visitors with pets are required to keep them on a short leash and firmly in control. Parents should keep their children in sight. Visitors are also urged to always drive with extreme caution, especially at intersections. Many walking surfaces are slippery, and there are steep, rocky bluffs at Jumonville Glen.

Illustration courtesy Maryland Historical Society

## The National Road

In many respects, the battle of Fort Necessity and the French and Indian War that followed set the stage for the American Revolution. Washington, seasoned in these campaigns, emerged as a prominent national leader, deeply aware of the value of the "Western Country" and eager to unite

the Eastern seaboard with the land beyond the mountains. Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, helped fulfill Washington's desire by producing the

plan that led Congress to approve construction of the National Road.

Begun in 1811, the National Road was America's first Federally funded highway and the first step in the development of a national road system. It ran from Cumberland, Md., to Vandalia, Ill., with a substantial section in

southwestern Pennsylvania. It was the primary road from the east coast to the western frontier from the late 1810s to the 1850s. The National Road followed generally the line of the Braddock Road westward as far as Braddock's grave, where it headed west to

Wheeling. Today, though realigned in places and resurfaced, U.S. 40 follows the same route as the National Road.

