

# *FORT NECESSITY*



*National Battlefield, Pennsylvania*

*At Fort Necessity, July 3, 1754, occurred the opening battle of the war fought by England and France for control of the North American Continent. More significantly, this event in the solitude of the Indian wilderness, sparked by an earlier skirmish at nearby Jumonville Glen, was the opening episode of a worldwide conflagration known in America as the French and Indian War and in Europe 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 would be forced to surrender to an enemy.*

### **FRENCH AND ENGLISH RIVALRY**

Rival claims between the French and English to the trans-Allegheny territory approached a climax about 1750. Based on the English claims, the Ohio Company (organized in 1748 by a group of Virginians) obtained a large grant of 200,000 acres in the upper Ohio Valley and established a post at Wills Creek, now Cumberland, Md. From here the company started to open an 80-mile wagon road westward to the Youghiogeny River.

Meantime, the French advanced southward and westward from Fort Niagara, driving out English traders. Lt. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, in 1753, sent an expedition to warn the French to withdraw. He selected George Washington to head the expedition. Washington, then only 21 years old, made the journey in midwinter of 1753-54, but the mission failed. Dinwiddie then sent a small force to build a fort at the forks of the Ohio River, where Pittsburgh is now situated, but the French drove off the Virginians and built Fort Duquesne on the site.

By April 1754, the advance of a small supporting force of Virginians had already started forward from Alexandria under young Washington, newly commissioned lieutenant colonel. This force was well beyond Wills Creek when Col. Joshua Fry, commanding the expedition, arrived there near the end of May. When Fry died at Wills Creek on May 31, Washington was left in command and afterwards commissioned a colonel.

### **THE JUMONVILLE FIGHT**

On May 24 Washington arrived in the Great Meadows, as the Fort Necessity area was then called. Despite the fact that the meadow was nearly all marsh, a stop was made here, as the site was considered to have a military value.



Three days later, a runner from Half King, a chief of the Senecas and a bitter foe of the French, arrived at Washington's camp at Great Meadows with the news that the hiding place of a body of French had been discovered on Chestnut Ridge.

Washington, leading a party of about 40 men, immediately set out from Great Meadows and at dawn reached Half King's camp, only 6 miles away, after an arduous all-night march over mountain trails in inky blackness and heavy rain. The united Virginians and Indians started for the camp of Joseph Coulon de Villiers, Sieur de Jumonville, the French commander, about 2 miles to the north.

Jumonville was taken by surprise. Ten men were killed, including Jumonville, and one was wounded. Twenty-one survivors were made prisoners, one man escaping to carry the news to the French at Fort Duquesne. Washington's command suffered only one man killed and two wounded. The site where this initial skirmish took place on May 28, 1754, is accessible to visitors. It may be reached by an improved road extending 3 miles north from U.S. 40 at Mt. Summit, just 5 miles west of Fort Necessity.

#### *SURRENDER OF FORT NECESSITY*

After the Jumonville fight, Washington undertook to fortify his position at Great Meadows. He built a palisade fort during the last 2 days of May and the first 3 days of June. (In a journal entry for June 25, Washington first speaks of this structure as "Fort Necessity.")

On June 9, Washington received reinforcements, increasing his force of Virginians at Great Meadows to 293 officers and men. An independent company of approximately 100 men from South Carolina, under the command of Capt. James Mackay, also arrived. With these reinforcements came supplies and nine swivel guns.

June was spent in opening a road from Fort Necessity to a clearing in the forest, known as Gist's Plantation (now Mount Braddock), in the direction of the forks of the Ohio. Alarming reports about the French reached Colonel Washington, and it was decided to withdraw the troops to Great Meadows, where they arrived on July 1. The next day, they strengthened Fort Necessity, which covered an area of less than one-third of an acre.

Shortly before noon on July 3 a force of about 600 French and 100 Indians appeared before the fort and began the attack. The fighting continued sporadically until about 8 p.m. First attempting a stand in front of the fort, Washington shortly withdrew his men to the entrenchments. Rain

which fell throughout the day soon flooded the marshy ground. Both sides suffered heavily, although the losses were greater among the Colonials than among the French and Indians.

Negotiations were in progress from 8 p.m. until near midnight following a proposal by Louis Coulon de Villiers, brother of Jumonville and now commander of the French, that Washington capitulate. The terms were finally reduced to writing and accepted by Washington and Mackay. The Colonials were to withdraw with honors of war, retaining their arms and baggage, but their nine swivel guns were to be surrendered.

The Colonial troops marched away from Fort Necessity on the morning of July 4 for Wills Creek, and from this point returned to Virginia. The French destroyed Fort Necessity and afterwards returned to Fort Duquesne.

#### *BRADDOCK'S CAMPAIGN*

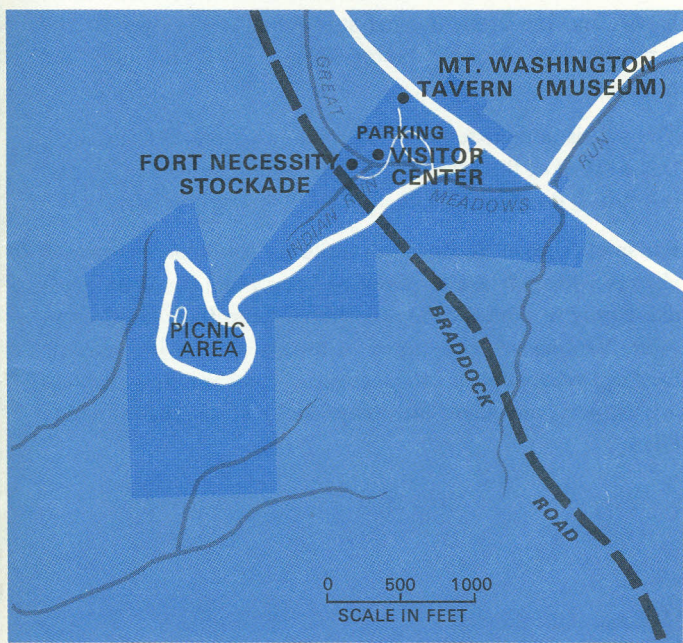
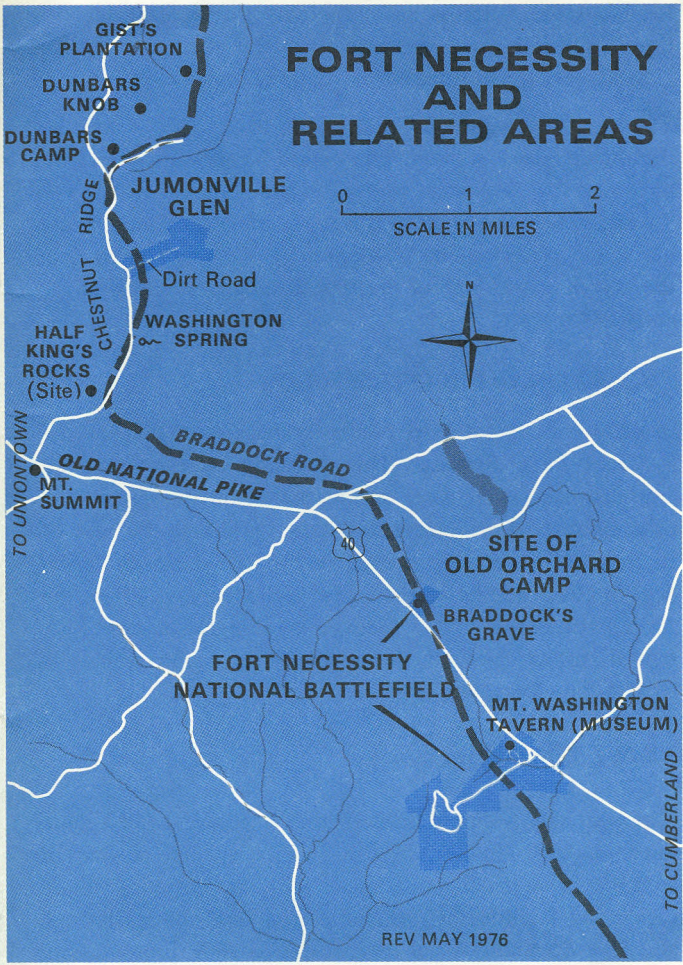
Following the failure at Great Meadows in 1754, England decided to send a large force against the French. On September 24, 1754, the Duke of Cumberland appointed Maj. Gen. Edward Braddock as captain general of all British soldiers in the American Colonies. An army of British and Colonial troops left Alexandria, Va., on March 15, 1755. They pushed westward to the Ohio Company's post at Wills Creek, which was renamed Fort Cumberland, and then over a 12-foot-wide road which Braddock ordered cut through the forest past Fort Necessity toward the forks of the Ohio. Braddock was mortally wounded on July 9 in the Battle of Monongahela, 8 miles from Fort Duquesne, and died during the retreat of his defeated army. His body was buried in the middle of the road at the site of the Old Orchard Camp, about 1 mile west of Fort Necessity. In 1804, remains said to be those of General Braddock were discovered by workmen in the old roadbed near a ravine. They were removed to the crest of an adjacent knoll and later a monument was erected marking the site along U.S. 40.

#### *THE NATIONAL ROAD AND MOUNT WASHINGTON TAVERN*

In many respects, the French and Indian War set the stage for the American Revolution. Washington, seasoned in these campaigns, emerged as a prominent colonial leader, deeply aware of the value of the "Western Country." Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under Thomas Jefferson, helped fulfill Washington's plans to unite the Eastern seaboard with the land west of the mountains. Gallatin arranged for the construction of the National Road, America's first federally



# FORT NECESSITY AND RELATED AREAS



financed highway, which followed the general route of the Braddock Road across the mountains. For several decades the young nation moved west along this road, present-day U.S. 40, until the railroads proved more efficient.

The Mount Washington Tavern, built about 1827, overlooks the site of Fort Necessity. The period furnishings reflect the building's use as a stage station on the National Road. The Tavern, a welcome sight to travelers, offered lodging, meals, news, and refreshments. A Conestoga Wagon, housed near the tavern, shows one of the typical modes of travel in the early 1800s.

### *THE NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD*

In 1933 the site of Fort Necessity became a part of the National Park System. The stockade, storehouse, and entrenchments were later reconstructed on the site of the original fort. Fort Necessity State Park and the site of Braddock's grave were transferred to the national battlefield in 1962, adding sections of Great Meadows where the 1754 battle was fought. George Washington at one time owned part of this land. Jumonville Glen, acquired in 1978, remains much as it was in 1754.

### *ABOUT YOUR VISIT*

Fort Necessity National Battlefield is 11 miles east of Uniontown on U.S. 40. Groups can receive special services if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent. Picnicking facilities are available from mid-spring through late fall. An audio-visual room offers a slide presentation; and, in the exhibit area, stories of the defense of the fort, the battle, and the archeological study that "rediscovered" the fort are told through photographs, maps, drawings, and artifacts.

The fort is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Route 2, Box 528, Farmington, PA 15437, is in charge.

**For safety's sake: Because our trails are sometimes crowded, visitors with pets are required to keep them on 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.**