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SPECIAL REPORT

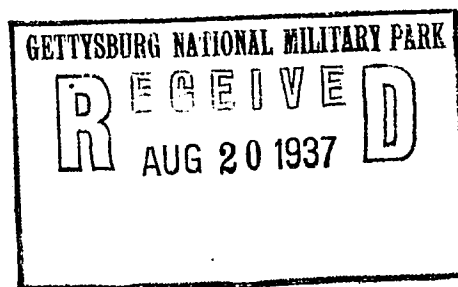
Concerning the Restoration of the Physical Features
of Fort Necessity Battlefield Site

By

JOHN P. COWAN
JUNIOR HISTORIAN

FT. NECESSITY SP-12

August 18, 1937



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Fort Necessity Battlefield Site
Farmington, Pennsylvania
August 18th, 1937

Mr. James R. McConaghie, Superintendent
Gettysburg National Military Park
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. McConaghie:

The following Special Report concerning the restoration of the physical features of Fort Necessity Battlefield Site, which has been prepared at your suggestion, is respectfully submitted.

This study has been confined to researches regarding the aspect of the Great Meadows at the time of the arrival of the Colonial troops under Lieut. Col. George Washington in 1754, particular stress being placed upon the question as to the garrison's water supply when the Stockade, named Fort Necessity, was erected early in June of that year.

Location

Fort Necessity Battlefield Site is located in Wharton township, Fayette county, Pennsylvania, 300 yards south of U.S. Route No. 40 (formerly the National Road) 11 miles east of Uniontown, Pa., and 50 miles west of Cumberland, Md. It consists of two acres of land in the form of a rectangle 252 by 347 feet lying on Meadow Run in a marshy tract known as the Great Meadows, a treeless area varying from 100 to 300 yards in width and about a mile in length. It is surrounded by hills reaching an altitude

of nearly 200 feet above the Meadows. These eminences formerly were densely wooded with oak, chestnut, maple and poplar.

Meadow Run has its headwaters about a mile northwest of the Battlefield Site. Fed by numerous mountain springs, it follows a winding course through the Great Meadows. In its natural channel there is no place where it has a straightaway flow of more than 30 yards. Through the Battlefield Site its course was straightened in 1932 and the banks were elevated to meet the grade of the surrounding land which was filled in to a height of about two feet above the level of the marsh. Beneath the site of the Stockade and the artificial elevation a drainage system was laid, this providing dry ground for the replica of Fort Necessity and the terrain immediately surrounding it. The restoration work was done in 1932 in connection with local activities in the observance of the George Washington Bi-Centennial celebration. Plans were drawn for an elaborate monument, and two massive stone bridges were thrown across the stream to accommodate foot paths leading from a parking area to the Stockade. Meadow Run is joined at right angles by a smaller stream, known as Indian Run, the outlet of hillside springs, which flows from the south. This tributary is a mere ditch, very narrow and from two to three feet deep. The ground, remaining in its natural condition, is covered with swamp grass, vines and small bushes. There is no record that any attempt was made to drain the marsh at Great Meadows for cultivation, and it was a tradition in the Fazenbaker family, last private owners of the land, that the plow should never disturb the soil of the battlefield. There is no evidence to the contrary.

Historical Narrative

Washington with less than 300 Virginia troops, the vanguard of a force organized by English southern colonies to challenge the French to possession of the territory along the Ohio, reached the Graet Meadows on May 24, 1754. Several days previously he had heard from traders and scouts that parties of French and Indians were in the woods observing his advance, and hurried forward to avail himself of the natural advantages of the Meadows as a place for defense. He thus describes his position: "We have with Nature's assistance, made a good intrenchment, and, by clearing the bushes out of these meadows, prepared a charming field for an encounter."*

The two water courses furnished effective trenches on two sides of the field in a manner that could be connected by a breastwork, theand the enclosed grasslands supplied forage for his horses and cattle. An enemy in making an effective attack would be obliged to forsake the shelter of the forest and fight in the open field.

Alarming reports of the approach of the French were received by Washington on his arrival and on May 28 occurred his skirmish seven miles to the westward where Capt. Coulon deJumonville and ten of his soldiers were killed and twenty captured, the Virginians' loss being one killed and two wounded. Returning to the Great Meadows Washington urged Col. Joshua Fry at the base at Wills Creek to send reinforcements, and directed the construction of a palisade which he named Fort Necessity. This work was completed June 3.**

* Letter to Gov. Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia, May 27, 1754. Virginia Historical Society.

** Washington to Dinwiddie, June 10, 1754. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

A few days later the garrison was increased by about 100 men through the arrival of a South Carolina company commanded by Capt. James Mackay. It was resolved to proceed to the mouth of Redstone creek on the Monongahela river and fortify the place as a base for attack on Fort Duquesne. Slow progress was made and Washington halted at Gist's plantation on the western slope of Laurel ridge where he learned that the French were approaching in force. Beginnings had been made in providing for defense, but the work was abandoned and a retreat was ordered when Washington's entreaties for help from the Indians failed. On July 1 the little army reached Fort Necessity. His men were in such an exhausted condition that it was decided to await supplies and reinforcements. In the meantime there was feverish activity in strengthening the fort.

Here he was attacked by at least 900 French and Indians on the morning of July 3 and the battle lasted till dark when the French called a parley. Washington, with less than 400 effectives engaged, lost 30 killed and 70 wounded. The French reported a trifling number of casualties, but it is believed that their loss was considerable. Washington was allowed to march out with the honors of war and to retain his arms and baggage. An exception was made to his artillery, which was left behind. On the morning of July 4 he marched to Wills Creek, while the French, after destroying the stockade, returned to Fort Duquesne.*

* Virginia Gazette, July 19, 1754.

Early Descriptions of the Site of Fort Necessity

The only contemporary description of the physical aspect of the site of Fort Necessity is that furnished by Washington which is quoted above. Late in June of the following year Braddock's army passed the Great Meadows and camped a mile beyond, but no mention of the battleground has been found in the writings of those who participated in that campaign. Meager French accounts throw no further light on the subject.

Col. James Burd, who followed the Braddock Trail past the Fort on his march to the mouth of Redstone creek in 1759, writes in his journal: "10th Sept. saw Colonel Washington's Fort which was called Fort Necessity. It is a small circular stockade with a small house in the center; on the outside there is a small ditch goes around it, about eight yards from the stockade. . . There is a small run of water just by it."

Judge James Veech, distinguished Fayette county jurist and historian, surveyed the site in 1816. At that time it seems that the positions of the trenches could be readily traced. He published the results of his investigation in "Monongahela of Old" published about 1856.

Jared Sparks in the preparation of his "Writings of Washington" visited the place in 1830. His description in part follows: "The Great Meadows is a level bottom, through which passes a small creek, and is surrounded by hills of moderate and gradual ascent. This bottom is entirely level, covered with long grass and small bushes. At a point where the fort stood it is about 250 yards wide. The position

of the fort was well chosen, being about 100 yards from the upland, or wooded ground, on the one side, and 150 yards on the other, and so situated on the margin of the creek, as to afford easy access to the water. At one point the high ground comes within 60 yards of the fort, and this was the nearest distance to which an enemy could approach under the shelter of trees. The outlines of the fort were still visible when the spot was visited by the writer in 1830, occupying an irregular square, the dimensions of which were about 100 feet on each side. One of these was prolonged further than the other for the purpose of reaching the water in the creek."

Judge Vcech takes issue with Col. Burd and Sparks in this fashion: "The engraving and description of Fort Necessity given in Sparks' Washington are inaccurate. It may have presented that diamond shape in 1830. But in 1816 the senior author of these sketches made a survey of it with compass and chain. As thereby shown, it was in the form of an obtuse angled triangle of 105 degrees, having its base or hypotenuse upon the run. The line of the base was, about midway, sected or broken, and about two perches of it thrown across the run, connecting with the base by lines of the triangle. One line of the angle was six, and the other seven perches; the base line eleven perches long, including the section thrown across the run. The lines embraced in all about 50 square perches of land, or nearly one-third of an acre. . . There were no traces of 'bastions' at angles or entrances. . . A more inexplicable and a much more inexcusable error than that in Mr. Sparks' great work is the statement of Col. Burd. He says the fort was round with a house in it. That Washington may have had some sort of log bark-

covered cabin erected within his lines is not improbable; but how the good Lancaster Colonel could metamorphose the lines into a circular form is a mystery which we cannot solve."

Reference is made to the survey by Freeman Lewis, described by Judge Veech and reproduced in "The Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania", edited by George Dallas Albert. A photostatic copy is attached to this Report. Archer Hulbert in his "Historic Highways of America" (Vol. 3, p. 173) published in 1903, questioned Veech's description and the Lewis survey. In 1901 he visited the site and a survey was made by Robert McCracken, C. E. (Blueprints of the McCracken survey are in the files of the Regional and Washington offices of the National Park Service.)

Archeological Explorations

The first practical archeological exploration of the site was made in 1931 by Harry R. Blackford, assistant county engineer of Fayette county, who undertook the work for the Fort Necessity Memorial Association preliminary to its restoration of the Stockade as an activity in the George Washington Bi-Centennial celebration.

Opening trenches in following and checking the surveys by Lewis and McCracken, Blackford was successful in unearthing portions of logs which are believed to be those of the original stockade. On several logs axe marks are visible on one end and on the other it appears that the wood had been burned. These archeological specimens together with bullets, cannon shot and flints found on the site, are in the collection of the Fort Necessity State Park Museum. On making this discovery Mr. Blackford revised his plan of

the fort as indicated on the attached blueprint. The excavations revealed the course of the old stream bed which was located by traces of pebbles, silt and sand which differed from the soil of the surrounding marsh. Comparison of the course of the oldtime channel of Great Meadow run with the location of the fragments of the original palisade in the angle on the north side of the fort seems to afford proof that the stockade at this point was projected into the stream in order to obtain a water supply inside the enclosure.

(NOTE--Mr. Blackford's report entitled "Record and Description of the Reconstruction of Fort Necessity" with blueprints of the Lewis and McCracken surveys are on file in the Washington and Regional offices of the National Park Service.)

In the restoration in 1932 the plans called for formal treatment and no consideration was given toward suggestions to bring the channel of the stream into its original course. Instead the channel was cut straight through the area and spanned by two massive stone bridges. Mr. Blackford heartily agreed with the plans for the landscaping on the outside of the stockade and still holds to these ideas. Although he feels certain that water from the stream was obtainable inside the palisade, he prefers the present park-like effect of landscape treatment to any proposed change toward restoring the surrounding land to its former physical appearance.

It is probable that Great Meadow run changed its course in the 100 years following the action at Fort Necessity. In the 1850's Godfrey Fazenbaker took out some of its curves and provided a ford for a farm lane which ran from his barn on the hillside north of

of the fort to his property on the opposite hill. The lane ran through the land on which stood the northeast angle of the stockade. For a short distance it traversed the lines of the trenches on the east side of the fort. The lane across the marsh was not fenced, and this section of the Great Meadows in Fazenbaker's time was used as a pasture field, as related by surviving members of the family.

Summary

It is believed that the Blackford survey furnishes the most authentic information upon which to base recommendations for the restoration of the physical aspect of the ground surrounding the Stockade. That the present palisade stands on the site of the original is not questioned. There is no better information than Blackford's as to the probable course of the stream in the period of 1754. Ends of logs found buried in the marsh at a depth of three or four feet have every appearance of being remains of the original palisade, and there is no record of fence posts or other timbers having been sunk in the ground on the site.

As previously stated, the ground immediately surrounding the Stockade has been filled in to a height of about two feet above the natural level of the marsh. On the north side of Great Meadow run this artificial elevation reaches 2.4 feet above the marsh. This elevated area embraces practically the entire two-acre quadrangle. From the west side of the two-acre plot to the western boundary of the State Park is 137.5 feet, the stream flowing in a general direction from west to east. The State Park is bounded on the west

by the property of William Burley. Any obstruction in the stream on Federal property would result during periods of heavy rainfall in an overflow on Burley's cultivated land. On July 11, 1937, when a precipitation of 4.2 inches occurred within a period of three hours resulted in a flood in Great Meadow run, the water inundating the marsh and rising to a height of nearly a foot on the north side of the Stockade. (See photographs)

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing it is respectfully recommended that steps toward the restoration of the Battlefield Site to as nearly as possible its original state in the Great Meadows area would require (1) that the artificial elevation be lowered by the removal of the earth which was filled in in 1932; (2) that the stream be brought back to its original channel as indicated by the location of the old stream bed in Blackford's plan; and (3) that the two stone bridges be removed and the present channel be filled up. In changing the course of Great Meadow run in order to bring the water to the projecting angle on the north side of the fort it will be observed that slight modifications could be made in following the Blackford plan in order to prevent erosion.

To prevent flooding and provide drainage inside the Stockade it is recommended that an exception be made whereby the palisades would stand in their present position and an area of about twenty feet around the fort on sides not facing the stream be maintained at its present artificial elevation. This would allow visitors to walk dryshod when inspecting the outside of the stockade.

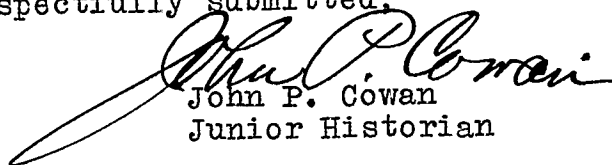
If the original channel, as indicated by Blackford, were restored, the stream would be brought past the projected angle on the north side of the fort, the normal surface of the water being about four feet below the level of the ground inside the stockade. Water would be accessible through the removal of the palisades for a distance of about six feet. The erection of a palisaded bastion on the opposite or north side of the stream would afford protection from an enemy's cross-fire. Whether this method was adopted by Washington in protecting his water supply is doubtful. Blackford states positively that it was not—that the palisades were placed in the stream and the water "oozed" through. It will be borne in mind that Washington in an emergency was erecting a temporary structure and was not obliged to provide against flood hazards. Attention is called to the drawing in the in-set showing the fort area on a large scale in the new Master Plan for Fort Necessity State Park recently prepared at PA SP-12 and now under consideration. In this plan the bastion idea has been adopted and offered for approval without consultation with the Junior Historian. Further study and several conferences with Mr. Blackford seems to warrant the recommendation that the palisades between "E" and "D" on the Blackford plan be replaced in concrete in the stream bed and that the fire step in that section of the stockade be removed to a depth which would allow the water to enter. This would conform to the Blackford plan and would be an authentic restoration as shown by his explorations. It seems entirely practicable. A wide channel at this point would lessen flood hazards and the concrete base easily could be concealed.

A channel five feet wide is sufficient to carry off the normal flow of water at all seasons. During periods of extraordinarily heavy rainfall the volume of water is so great that it inundates the entire marsh. This is proof that a conduit, unless it were of immense size, and, on account of the cost, impractical to build, would be inadequate to carry off the surplus water in flood time. Therefore, it is recommended that the earth be removed from the area from the north boundary of the Battlefield Site (the two-acre plot), this excavation being to such depth that the original marshy condition be restored by planting bushes and dowing grass. The swale thus created would accommodate any probable volume of water in the overflow and save the restored channel from severe erosion in flooding.

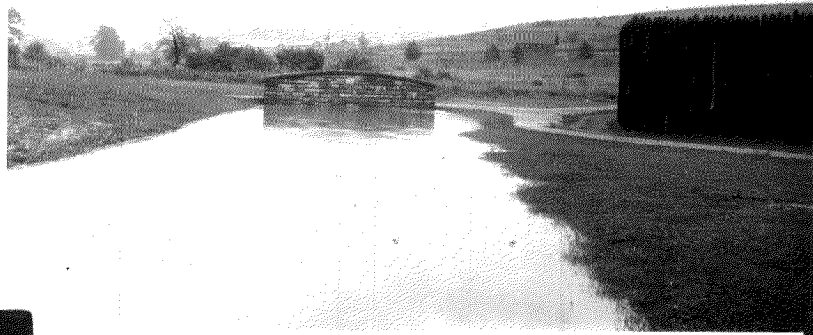
It is recommended also that in the event of restoration that every possible advantage be taken of the opportunity for archeological exploration under capable supervision.

No attempt has been made in this Special Report to deal with the engineering problems involved.

Respectfully submitted,


John P. Cowan
Junior Historian

cc: Washington—Mr. Spalding
Richmond—R. O.; Mr. MacGregor
Harrisburg—Mr. Sheffield
D Y



Flood in Great Meadow Run July 11, 1937, after the water
had receded about one and one-half feet

