



Defeat of General Braddock in the French and Indian War in 1755 (wood-engraving, Ballou's Pictorial, July 7, 1855).

# George Washington's Roads to Pittsburgh

The organizers of Pittsburgh's much-anticipated 250th-birthday celebration in 2008 have focused on the anniversary of the city's naming and plan a yearlong series of spectacular events. But it was a series of events in the area of today's Point State Park in the mid-1700s that determined the outcome of the French and Indian War—and basically made the American Revolution and the creation of a continent-wide United States possible.

It is fitting that George Washington himself was so essential in the establishment of Pittsburgh. When the French Canadians, in an effort to assert control of the Ohio River Valley, began building a series of forts along the region's major rivers and lakes, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent Major Washington to warn the French to leave. Upon reaching the Forks area in November 1753, Washington wrote in his journal: "I spent some Time in viewing the Rivers, & the Land in the Fork, which I think extremely well situated for a Fort; as it has the absolute Command of both Rivers. The Land at the Point is 20 or 25 feet above the common Surface of the Water; & a considerable Bottom of flat well timber'd Land all around it, very convenient for Building."

The French officers whom Washington confronted at Forts Venango and LeBoeuf refused to withdraw. In response, Dinwiddie next sent Captain William Trent to build a fort at the Forks of the Ohio—the first settlement in present-day Pittsburgh. Fort Prince George was never completed, because in April 1754 a much larger group of French forces, sent by the Marquis Duquesne, governor of New France, arrived to claim the area; the British colonials, outnumbered, slithered back to Virginia, and the French replaced the half-built fort with their own Fort Duquesne.

Dinwiddie again sent forces to expel the French. After a successful encounter in May, Colonel Washington and his soldiers met defeat at the Battle of Fort Necessity on July 3, 1754. Thus, the battle to control the land of the future city of Pittsburgh became the impetus for the French and Indian War.

Washington, however, continued his part in retaking Fort Duquesne. Together with General Edward Braddock's regiment, Washington and his men in 1755 surveyed and built the famous Braddock's Road (the origin of today's Route 40, or National Road). Equally famous was the disastrous Battle of the Monongahela in the same year, ending in Braddock's death and the continuing hegemony of the French over the area.

Soon, a renewed attempt to capture Fort Duquesne involved the building of another important route: General John Forbes and his 7,000 troops traveled the new Forbes Road across the Allegheny Mountains to reach the French fort. Other events in the war by then had conspired to leave Fort Duquesne with an insufficient population to stave off an attack; the French abandoned the fort and destroyed it. Forbes arrived on November 25, 1758, and without any further conflict, led a triumphant military parade into the Point; among the many officers at the celebration was George Washington.

On the ashes of Fort Duquesne, General Forbes ordered the

construction of Fort Pitt, which was named after British Secretary of State William Pitt. On November 27, Forbes sent a letter to Pitt in London—a letter from "Pittsburgh." Washington, in a note to a Virginia friend, announced: "I have the pleasure to inform you that Fort Duquesne or rather the ground on which it stood, was possessed by his Majesty's troops on the 25th and the British flag flies over the bastion." Within the next several months, Washington returned to Mount Vernon and married Martha.

During Washington's presidency, a tax dispute between Congress and whiskey distillers in western Pennsylvania ignited the Whiskey Rebellion. Washington himself, along with General Henry Lee, led 13,000 militiamen west in 1794; but the President returned to Philadelphia after reaching the town of Bedford, roughly a hundred miles from Pittsburgh. The final connection between Washington and Pittsburgh was the momentous occasion of a rebellious American region eliciting the only instance in which a sitting U.S. President personally commanded an army. □

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