

# The Battle of the Monongahela



**James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6** focuses on British General Edward Braddock's stunning defeat at the Monongahela River in 1755



**T**he French and Indian War has as much to do with geography as it has to do with the participants. It changed the map of North America.

France lost its territories in America, while England succeeded in establishing control of the areas east of the Mississippi and Canada. This dominance set the stage for the American Revolution which was to come.

The battles that took place between 1753 and 1760 resulted in more casualties than the American War of Independence. Names

such as Edward Braddock, George Washington, Robert Rogers, Sir William Johnson, Montcalm, and James Wolfe emerged as major players on this stage.

The Monongahela 'story' unfolds in 1753 with France building a line of forts in the Ohio River Valley. This at a time when Lieutenant Governor Robert Dunwiddie of Virginia granted 1.5 million acres of land in the valley to Virginia families.

Dunwiddie dispatched George Washington, age 21, to seek out the French and present demands that they abandon their forts. After a 500-

mile journey through the wilderness, Washington met with the French Commandant at Fort Le Boeuf. Not surprisingly, the French were not at all receptive, and Washington returned to Williamsburg, Virginia, empty-handed.

The following year, 1754, Washington was instructed to build a road that would allow British forces to invest Fort Duquesne, which was located at the confluence of the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela Rivers – site of present-day Pittsburgh. In the process, he ran into a French detachment which was on its way to deliver an ultimatum to the



British Royal Artillery, 6 pound gun and crew (43144)





Huron Warrior, French ally (47018)



British Grenadier, 44th Regiment of Foot (47001)



French Troupe de la marine (43157)



British Officer (General Braddock) (47006)



Virginia Provincial Ranger (47003)

Virginians. Aided by Mingo warriors led by the Seneca Chief Tanacharison (The Half-King), Washington attacked what was later said to be a diplomatic mission. Ten of the French were killed and 21 were taken prisoner. Among the dead was the French Commander Monsieur de Jumonville.

Learning the news of the unprovoked slaughter, Jumonville's older brother Captain de Villiers set out in pursuit of the Virginians. He met up with them in Great Meadows, where Washington had built a small fort suitably named Fort Necessity. On July 4, Villiers captured the fort. Washington – who could not speak or read French – unwittingly signed an agreement of capitulation that contained a statement admitting the 'assassination' of Jumonville. The assassination of a diplomatic envoy

was viewed in the eighteenth century as an act of war.

Thus it was that young George Washington was instrumental in lighting the spark that would ignite what Winston Churchill called 'the first world war.' It eventually engulfed Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, West Africa, India and the Philippines.

In the spring of 1755, the French sent the equivalent of six regiments to Canada, while the British ordered the 44<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Regiments of Foot to the colonies. Under the command of Major General Edward Braddock of the Coldstream Guards, the mission was to march from Alexandria, Virginia, and wrest Fort Duquesne from the French. Braddock, though a career soldier, lacked battlefield experience. Moreover, he was stubborn, impetuous, and had a disdain for both the colonists and native Indians. The Oneida Chief





French Canadian Militiaman (47020)

limited resources and faced with Braddock's artillery, decided to leave the fort and ambush the British along their line of march. Led by Captain de Beaujeu, they consisted of nearly 900 men – 108 *troupes de la marine* (the French Ministry of the Navy was responsible for the administration of colonies in America, hence 'de la marine'), 146 Canadian militiamen, and 637 Indian warriors.

The ambush was successful, with the French barring the way, while the Indians, firing from behind trees, attacked along the flanks of the British column. Braddock refused to let his men fight 'Indian style,' and so they were shot where they rigidly stood in the middle of the road.

Of the 1,200 British troops involved, there were about a thousand casualties. Five hundred of these, including General Braddock, died. Panic spread among the British troops and they fled back across the Monongahela, leaving many of the wounded to a horrific fate.

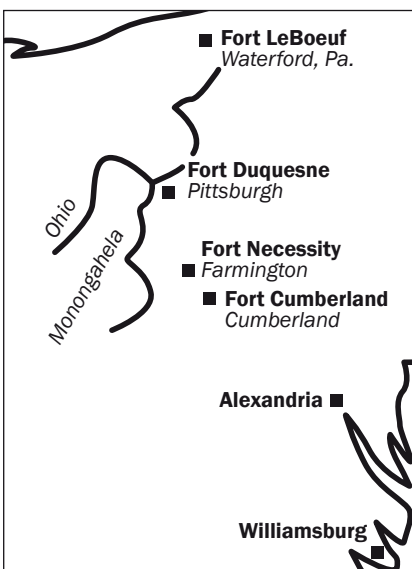
The British learned a costly lesson: They were fighting in a far different world than they were accustomed to in Europe. Stealth, surprise, scouting, flexibility, improvisation became synonymous with survival – let alone victory. This in turn led to the formation of ranger units and light infantry companies.

In one of the many ironies of war, it was just three years later, in November 1758, that the French abandoned Fort Duquesne and British troops under General Forbes marched, without incident, into this coveted triangle of the three rivers that had cost so many lives. ■

**Jim Hillestad operates under the name "The Toy Soldier Museum." His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227, or visit his new website at [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com).**

## A BIZARRE FOOTNOTE

**Braddock's arrogant, aggressive, and unyielding personality provoked widespread antipathy. At the Battle of the Monongahela, he refused to allow the Virginia militia to break formation and fight 'Indian style.' The story goes that a provincial soldier, Tom Faucett, after seeing Braddock cut his brother down with a sword for breaking ranks and standing by a tree, shot the General during the confusion of the battle. Myth? Or truth? We will probably never know.**



Monacatootha bitterly complained afterward that Braddock 'looked upon us as dogs, and would never hear anything what was said to him...that was the reason that a great many warriors left him and would not be under his command.'

Braddock assembled his force at Fort Cumberland, Maryland. On June 7, 1755, they got underway for

Fort Duquesne, 112 miles away. To get there they would have to trek their way through a wilderness, cut a road 12 feet in width, and cross the formidable Allegheny Mountains.

The force at his disposal numbered 2,200 men – British regulars, Virginia Provincial Rangers, Artillerymen, Royal Navy sailors to haul the guns, and a handful of Indian scouts. The column, two miles long, trudged through the forest. The going was slow and after the first week, Braddock split the force into two divisions. He then proceeded with a 'flying column' of twelve hundred men and six artillery pieces (two six-pounders and four twelve-pounder cannons).

On the afternoon of July 9, the column crossed the Monongahela River and was within eight miles of the objective, Fort Duquesne – all the while under the watchful eyes of Indian scouts allied with the French.

The French, meanwhile, with