



"Scouting for the English," a painting by Robert Griffing, depicts a lone Indian warrior silently and patiently keeping an eye on the French-held Fort Duquesne across the Monongahela at the forks of the Ohio. This artwork was inspired by British Gen. John Forbes' successful campaign in 1758.

TERROR ON THE MONONGAHELA

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

Figures produced by John Jenkins Designs inspire James H. Hillestad to create a dramatic diorama depicting Braddock's Defeat

About two years ago, I discovered the wonderful figures of John Jenkins Designs. The sculpting and painting are first class and have a sense of realism seldom seen.

In particular, the figures relating to the French and Indian War were fascinating. I soon focused on building a diorama that would use them, specifically to depict the 1755 defeat of British Gen. Edward Braddock at the Monongahela River in what is now the U.S. state of Pennsylvania.

AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING

As Hong Kong-based maker John Jenkins created more and more of the painted metal figures, my "Terror on the Monongahela" diorama grew in size to 5 feet by 30 inches.

The project became an ambitious undertaking.

Researching the geography of the battle scene and the battle itself took four months.

Creating the display consumed three months.

I made shale cliffs, a waterfall and a stream to be bridged.

Trees of species native to the area, ground cover, ferns and cattails evoked the woodland landscape. Rocks were hand-cast using plaster and rubber molds, then finished with a black and gray wash.

To complete the scene, approximately 100 figures were placed in position.

BRADDOCK'S MISSION

Braddock's mission was to capture the French-held Fort Duquesne, built where the Ohio River forms at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. Later named Fort Pitt by the British, it was the future site of Pittsburgh.

For the task, Braddock had 1,400 men. About 900 were



Watchful eyes follow the advance of the British column.



Eastern Woodlands terrain takes shape on the 5-foot by 30-inch diorama base.



The diorama base with figures, trees and ground cover in place.

WASHINGTON'S CLOSE CALL

Virginian George Washington was one of British Gen. Edward Braddock's aides-de-camp at the Battle of the Monongahela.

Washington arrived the evening before the battle. The delay was attributed to his suffering from dysentery and hemorrhoids (called in those days the "bloody flux"). The condition was so painful that he could ride a horse only by tying cushions over the saddle.

During the battle, four bullets pierced Washington's coat and two horses were shot from under him. Uninjured, he organized the retreat across the Monongahela and back to Fort Cumberland, Md.

The rest is history: Not only did Washington survive Braddock's Defeat, he went on to lead Colonial forces during the American Revolutionary War and became the first president of the United States.



French Capt. Beaujeu wears his gorget, but is otherwise dressed as an Indian as he waves his hat while directing the ambush.

regulars of the 44th and 48th Regiments of Foot and 200 were Virginia Provincial Rangers. His command also included artillerymen and Royal Navy sailors, whose job was to hoist artillery over the mountains.

To this force was added a sprinkling of only eight Indians serving as scouts. Braddock depreciated the value of Indians and offended them to the point that most wanted no part in the expedition.

The French, however, with fewer regular



The French and Indians come to grips with the fighting remnants of the British column.



The 44th Regiment marches over a log bridge spanning a creek as the British advance into an ambush.

SPECIAL SECTION: FRENCH & INDIAN WAR



A wounded Indian is attended to while other warriors carry on the fight.



Canadian militiamen well concealed in the woods get ready to spring the trap.

“Braddock refused to let his men fight ‘Indian style,’ so they rigidly remained in formation in the open and were systematically annihilated.”

troops along with Canadian militiamen -- a total of about 254 -- relied heavily on their Indian allies, who supplied 650 warriors.

COLUMN AMBUSHED

The French realized they would be outgunned if the British besieged Fort Duquesne. As a result, a force of French troops and Indians, under the command of Capt. Liénard de Beaujeu, set out to ambush the British along their line of march after they had crossed the Monongahela.

The diorama depicts the moment of confrontation July 9, 1755. The French bar the way while their Indians allies fan out and attack the flanks of the enemy column.

Braddock refused to let his men fight “Indian style,” so they rigidly remained in formation in the open and were systematically annihilated.

Braddock was mortally wounded. The surviving British troops hastily retreated back over the Monongahela, leaving their wounded comrades to a terrible fate.

I am indebted to the curators at Fort Pitt, Fort Ligonier and to the Sen. John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh for their guidance in creating the “Terror on the Monongahela” diorama. ■



Grenadiers defend the colours as the British stand immobile and are cut down.



A cannon of the Royal Artillery engages the French while an Indian dispatches a British officer at bottom left.



Caught in the middle, the Virginians defend themselves.

ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA. Another of his dioramas portraying the 1758 Battle on Snowshoes appears elsewhere in this special section on the French and Indian War.