School for a Soldier: George Washington in the French and Indian War

Speech Delivered at Mount Vernon December 6, 2006

As a child George Washington admired his older half brother Lawrence. The son of Augustine Washington and Jane Butler, Lawrence was 14 years senior to George. Lawrence's mother had died when he was barely 11 and his father remarried Mary Ball and with her he had five children, among them George.

What young Washington admired most about his older brother was that he was a soldier. Commissioned a captain Lawrence had served in the British army during the War of Jenkins Ear. He sailed with Admiral Edward Vernon to the Caribbean and participated in the siege of Cartagena. Cartagena was a graveyard for the British. Thousands of British soldiers died of malaria, yellow fever and a variety of camp fevers. Somehow Lawrence managed to survive, and indeed, he grew to love soldiering. In a letter to his father, which was likely shared with George, Lawrence wrote "I am resolved to persevere. War is horrid in fact, but much more so in imagination. We [have] learned to live on ordinary diet, to watch much, & disregard the noise, or shot of cannon."

Shortly after Lawrence returned to Virginia Augustine Washington died. Fatherless at age 11 George grew even closer to his brother. In 1743 Lawrence married Ann Fairfax joining him to one of Virginia's most powerful families. Lawrence was not shy in using his newly established family influence to advance his own career. He politicked successfully to become Adjutant General of the Virginia militia. As befitted his role as older brother and surrogate father, Lawrence was anxious to advance his step brother's station as well. In late summer 1746 when an English frigate dropped anchor off Alexandria Lawrence saw a chance to secure fame and fortune for his brother. Using his Fairfax connections Lawrence secured a midshipman's berth for young George. It was a prize worth taking, and soon to be midshipman Washington, told his brother and patron that he would "be steady and thankfully follow [his] advice." George packed his sea bag and headed for the ship. Neither George nor Lawrence, however, had counted on Mary Ball Washington. Mrs. Washington was a strong willed woman with whom George would have a long and intriguing relationship. She would have nothing to do with her son going to sea. When her brother in England wrote to her that his young nephew would be better off apprenticing to a "Tinker" than entering the navy Mary Ball put an end to her son's aspiring career as an officer in the Royal Navy.

Having run aground on one course Lawrence charted a new direction for his brother. Perhaps something closer to home might be more suitable. Land was big business in eighteenth century Virginia, and in the kaleidoscopic world of real estate speculation there was always need for land surveyors. It could be a difficult job. Trekking through wilderness laying out boundary lines required not only a keen eye for topography, and

some skill in mathematics, but also physical strength. By his mid teens Washington was already six feet tall, putting him a head or so above his peers. He took pride in his bearing, “straight as arrow” as one observer noted, and he even boasted a bit about himself claiming that “he never met any man who could throw a stone so great a distance as [myself].” Lawrence stepped in again, this time with his stepmother’s approval, and hired a tutor to teach his step brother the fine points of surveying.

Having helped his brother develop a skill Lawrence turned again to family connections to help him get a job. Thanks to Lawrence in the fall of 1747 the Fairfaxes invited George to join a month long surveying expedition to the South Branch of the Potomac River to help survey family lands. In preparation for his first great adventure Washington bought a small notebook, 6 inches by 3 ¼ inches. On the first page he wrote “A Journal of My Journey over the Mountains began Fryday the 11 th of March 1747/48.” Everything he saw intrigued this sixteen year old. Two days out he recorded “we went through the most beautiful Groves of Sugar Trees & spent the best part of the Day in admiring the Trees and richness of the land.” He did complain about the vermin that infested his blanket, but even those irksome critters could not cool his fondness for the outdoors. Love of the land is a constant theme in Washington’s life. He learned “to sleep in the open Air before a fire.” He forded streams running at flood. He sat by the fire with Indians, and drank with them as he listened to the rhythm of their drums and watched them dance wildly about in a great circle. He hunted wild turkeys and took special note of the “Rattled Snake” he encountered.

Washington's journal leaves no doubt that he had fallen in love with the wilderness. He was intrigued by the land and the people he saw. He embraced the physical challenge. Although this, his first voyage, lasted barely one month, it was a transforming experience.

Thanks to Lawrence and the Fairfax connection Washington did well as a surveyor. Lawrence, however, was not doing well. He was dying, most likely of tuberculosis. In the summer of 1749 he went to England to seek a cure. He returned to Virginia no better. A warmer climate, the doctors told him, might be helpful and so in the early fall of 1751 Lawrence, accompanied by his step brother, sailed for the Barbados. Unfortunately, a few months stay there and a few weeks in Bermuda did not alter the course of the disease. Lawrence returned to Virginia and died on July 26, 1752.

Lawrence's death had been so long in coming that it was hardly a shock. Indeed, although he mourned for him Lawrence's death opened new opportunities for Washington, not the least being that by his brother's will he became the residual heir to Lawrence's estate Mount Vernon. He was also heir to his brother's position in Virginia society, in particular to that of being a soldier. On his deathbed Lawrence refused to surrender his post as the colony's adjutant general, hoping to engineer the post for his brother. Washington was doing his part as well politicking for the job even while his brother lay dying. Only a few months after Lawrence's death Governor Robert Dinwiddie commissioned Washington adjutant general with the rank of major, for the Northern Neck of Virginia. He was barely 21 years old.

Washington's appointment as adjutant came at a critical moment. Governor Dinwiddie along with many other prominent Virginians had invested heavily in western lands through the Ohio Company. The King had granted the company 500,000 acres in the Ohio Valley along with the privileges of fur trading. That investment was at risk for the French too claimed these western lands. To assert their rights the French had sent native war parties sweeping through the valley to drive out British interlopers. Episodic violence was the normal condition in the Ohio Valley. Indeed, everywhere along the border between French Canada and British North America from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico uncertain boundaries and conflicting land claims kept each side on edge. Frequently, tensions along these borders erupted into petty warfare. On the face of it, however, as much as the wax seals and documents of diplomacy could make it so, officially peace prevailed between England and France.

In the summer of 1752 the Marquis Duquesne, Canada's new governor arrived at Quebec. He carried instructions from his king that would shatter the peace. No one, the governor was told, ought to trifle with the interests of the king for "the river Ohio and the rivers which fall into it unquestionably belong to France." Duquesne was ordered to occupy the valley by erecting permanent forts. In the spring of 1753, 2000 French soldiers made their way across the lakes to lay out a series of forts from Lake Erie reaching south to the forks of the Ohio where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers joined.

The French “invasion” drew a hard response from London. In mid October Dinwiddie received orders from the king. He was to verify the rumors of French advances and “if You shall find, that any Number of Persons, whether Indians, or Europeans, shall presume to erect any Fort of Forts within the Limits of our Province of Virginia … You are required of Them to peaceably to depart, and not to persist in such unlawful Proceedings, & if notwithstanding your Admonitions, They do still endeavour to carry on any such unlawfull and unjustifiable Designs, We do hereby strictly charge, & command You, to drive them off by Force of Arms.” With winter approaching it was a poor time to order a party west, nonetheless, in the face of the French threat Dinwiddie acted quickly. He did not have to look far for an officer to send on this mission. Washington stepped forward and “offered himself to go.”

In less than a week Washington was on his way west. He traveled with Jacob Van Braam a Dutchman passing himself off as a French interpreter. It took them two weeks to reach Wills Creek where Christopher Gist, an experienced guide and employee of the Ohio Company joined them, along with four other frontiersmen. Washington’s goal was to reach Logstown, an Indian settlement about 20 miles downriver from the Forks where he hoped to meet with the Tanaghrisson, better known as the Half – King one of the principal native leaders in the Ohio Valley. Tanaghrisson was ripe to help the English. He hated the French. According to one story they had boiled and eaten his father. In any case they had frequently insulted him. With the Half King’s help Washington planned to recruit a strong Indian party to accompany him on his trek to the French. As soon as they met Tanaghrisson took a liking to the young Virginian, and the chief agreed to

accompany him north to visit the French. His warriors, however, were more cautious. In the face of a powerful French juggernaut that seemed to be advancing everywhere erecting forts, evicting traders and intimidating Indians, Governor Dinwiddie had sent a young inexperienced officer accompanied by only six men. When the warriors asked what he intended to do at his meeting with the French Washington replied that his mission was to deliver “a Letter to the French Commandant of very great Importance.” The warriors found this answer less than reassuring. Only three stepped forward to accompany Tanaghrisson and Washington.

Washington’s party headed north from Logstown, slogging along trails left muddy by the cold rains of late fall. It took five days to reach Venango. Here they met the fort’s grizzened commander Phillipe Chabert de Joncaire, a veteran of the troupe de la marine, regular soldiers stationed in Canada. Joncaire was more than twice Washington’s age. At the prospect of a visit with convivial, albeit English company, Joncaire brought out the best bottles from his frontier wine cellar and invited Washington to dinner. As the evening wore on, loosened tongues wagged and Washington listened. Joncaire predicted that the French would soon have possession of all of the Ohio. He knew, he told Washington, that “the English could raise two Men for their one,” but that seeming advantage, he boasted, was more than offset by the ability of the French to strike quickly. French hatchets would fall while the English slept. Late the next morning Major Washington headed north to Fort Le Boeuf.

At Le Boeuf Washington met Jacques Legardeur de Saint Pierre, another tough Canadian. Legardeur greeted the Virginians with wry amusement. Was this all the force Dinwiddie could assemble – an inexperienced militia officer, five frontiersmen and four Indians of doubtful loyalty? On the other side, however, Washington was impressed, describing Legardeur as an "elderly Gentleman [with] much the Air of a Soldier." Legardeur invited Washington to dine with him. The French claim to the Ohio was absolute, he declared, and as a soldier of the king he would defend the territory. When Washington presented him with Dinwiddie's letter demanding that the French withdraw, the commander responded with more courtesy than the situation demanded. "As to the summons you send me to retire, I do not think myself obliged to obey it." Washington noted Legardeur's succinct reply, and headed back to Williamsburg.

After a miserable return trip that took a nearly a month, during which "there was but one Day on which it did not rain or snow incessantly" Washington arrived at the Governor's palace in Williamsburg. His report to Dinwiddie presented an alarming but hardly surprising picture. Dinwiddie took Washington's report and much to the major's surprise ordered it published. The governor was playing a dangerous game, and Washington was his pawn. By printing the report and circulating it both in America and England Dinwiddie was deliberately stirring the political pot, hoping to rally support for another bold move. That move came in late March when the governor promoted Major Washington to Lieutenant Colonel and ordered him "towards the Ohio … to build forts, and to defend the Possessions of his majesty against the attempts and Hostilities of the French."

Washington's expedition was delayed for weeks while he tried unsuccessfully to recruit men. Not until Dinwiddie offered Ohio Company land as a signing bonus did sufficient men volunteer. As the men assembled in Alexandria Washington was not happy with what he saw. They were, according to him, an unimpressive lot, 'loose, Idle persons … many of them [are] without Shoes, others want Stockings, some are without shirts, and not a few …have Scarce a Coat, or Waistcoat to their Backs." At noon on April 2, 186 men began their march to the Ohio.

While Washington and his men sliced through brush and forded swollen streams the French were on the move as well. In mid April a large force arrived at the forks of the Ohio and began to build a stockade which they christened Fort Duquesne.

By late May after nearly two months of hard marching Washington's men had come within 50 miles of Duquesne. By now Washington knew that the French force at the Forks greatly outnumbered his own so he decided to halt his advance and take post at a place called Great Meadows. Here, he told his officers, they would wait for new orders and the reinforcements which had been promised by Governor Dinwiddie.

The French knew of Washington's approach. At Duquesne the fort's commander Claude Pierre Contrecoeur concluded that since the Virginians were few in number and lightly armed, they must be enroute to parley and not to fight. On May 23 Contrecoeur dispatched a thirty-man patrol under the command of Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers

de Jumonville to gather information about the English, and if possible, meet with them to order them from the French King's lands.

Washington suspected that the French might be seeking him. On the evening of the 27th his suspicions were confirmed when he received an urgent message from his old friend the Half King that a French party was hiding nearby in "a low obscure Place." In his diary Washington recorded what he did next. Fearing that the "French [might] attack our Camp [we] set out in a heavy Rain, and in a Night as dark as Pitch, along a Path scarce broad enough for one Man… All night long we continued our Rout, and the 28th, about Sun-Rise we arrived at the Indian Camp, where after having held a Council with the Half King, it was concluded that we should fall on them together."

Silently, Washington's men accompanied by several of the Half King's warriors approached the "low Obscure Place" now called Jumonville Glen. The sun had barely risen and the French were stirring from sleep. Without warning Washington ordered his men to fire. In barely 15 minutes 10 French were dead, one wounded and 21 taken prisoner. In the midst of the brief melee the Half King's warriors swept into the glen and scalped several of the dead. Tanaghrisson himself, according to some accounts scalped Ensign Jumonville , crushed his skull with a tomahawk and washed his hands in the officer's brains.   Washington description of the event was less graphic. He recounted the fight to his brother John Augustine, boasting "I heard the bullets whistle, and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound." When he read this report King George II is reputed to have commented "[Lt. Col Washington] would not say so, if he had been used

to hear many." The indefatigable court gossip Horace Walpole read the same report and exclaimed that this young man has "set the world on fire."

Convinced that as soon as they heard the news the French at Duquesne were likely to counter attack, Washington, retreated quickly back to Great Meadows and set his men to building a crude stockade he named Fort Necessity. Ever the optimist Washington reported to Dinwiddie "We have, with nature's assistance, made a good Intrenchment, and, by clearing the Bushes out of these Meadows, prepar'd a charming field for an Encounter." That "Charming field" was in fact a muddy trap. Heavy rains turned the meadow into a swamp; the "Intrenchments" became running brooks. The fort's timbers could barely stand upright against the incessant spring rains let alone resist enemy musket and cannon.

At Duquesne Contrecouer moved slowly. He was awaiting reinforcements and in late June they arrived consisting of "300 savages and 50 Frenchmen" commanded by Francois Coulon de Villiers, Ensign Jumonville's older brother. When he learned the sad news of his brother's death and the questionable circumstances of the encounter, de Villiers asked Contrecoeur for the honor of commanding the retaliatory expedition. De Villiers left Duquesne at the head of 500 men on June 28th.

It took de Villiers four days to come to the place where his brother had died. In their haste to leave the Virginians had not paused to bury the dead. Scavengers, summer heat

and mutilation made the bodies unrecognizable. The stench was overwhelming. The French buried their fallen and then continued on the march.

On the morning of July 3 de Villiers reached Fort Necessity. He stood at the edge of a wood line on the southwest side of the meadow in full view of the fort. The French outnumbered the English by at least two to one. De Villiers gave the order to attack and while his Indian allies watched three columns of French soldiers advanced towards the stockade. They halted, fired a volley, and continued their approach. As they drew nearer Washington ordered his men to fall back into prepared trenches. Not wishing to risk a frontal assault against a protected enemy, the French withdrew and set out to invest the fort.

For ten hours de Villiers kept up a steady fire on the fort. The situation was hopeless, and at dusk when the French offered to parley Washington agreed to talk. Van Braam was the only available officer who spoke French. Washington sent him to negotiate. De Villiers told Van Braam that since the two nations were still at peace he was willing to grant generous terms. If the Virginians surrendered they would be free to return home. Van Braam made his report to Washington who agreed to the terms but only if De Villiers agreed to put them in writing. Once more Van Braam trekked to the French lines. De Villiers ordered his clerk to write the terms. Van Braam took the document and headed back to the stockade. By this time the rains had begun again. Van Braam entered the hut where Washington and his officers had gathered. It was a dark and dingy room lit by a single candle. Van Braam took the surrender document from his pocket. The rain had

socked it and the ink was running. He began to read, stumbling over words he could barely make out. No one else present could read French. Washington listened and then signed. Weeks later he would learn that Van Braam's translation was negligent in the extreme. In reading the surrender document the Dutchman had carelessly skipped over the word "assassination" which the French had inserted to describe the affair at Jumonville Glen. Van Braam translated it simply as "killing" thus removing the sinister meaning. By signing Washington had unknowingly confessed to foully murdering Ensign Jumonville.

At daybreak on the fourth of July two ranks of French soldiers came smartly to attention in Great Meadows. To the steady beat of a French drum, Washington and his men marched between the lines. They paused in a far corner of the meadow and looked back as the French, amidst a series of salutes, raised their flag. A few hours later Washington ordered his men to fall in to begin their somber return east.

Having failed in his mission the young colonel had every reason to believe that his military career was over. Imagine his surprise when upon reaching Williamsburg Governor Dinwiddie, instead of dressing him down, welcomed him as a hero. Dinwiddie cared less about Washington's failure and much more about his own career and the future of the empire. Criticism of Washington could only lead to embarrassing questions about the affair at Jumonville Glen and raise issues about the governor's judgment in dispatching an inexperienced officer with too few men on an impossible mission. Dinwiddie needed to lay the blame on the French not on Washington. In the twisted skein

of events leading to war, Washington's western disaster was critical, but it was only one thread in a complex tapestry being woven in London and Paris.

Washington had taken the stage as a minor actor in a rising drama being played out in several parts of the British Empire. Indeed, alarmed by the growing French threat in North America, of which Washington's defeat was only one example, the British ministry had finally decided to take action. London was abuzz with the news. The king had ordered two regiments to Virginia under the command of General Edward Braddock. Braddock's orders were specific – drive the enemy from the Ohio. At the same time the French too were on the move dispatching soldiers to Canada. The crisis was escalating.

Braddock arrived in Virginia in late February 1755. Almost as soon as he stepped ashore a messenger handed him a letter from Washington who wrote the general that he was anxious to be of service. Braddock needed Washington. Washington was one of the few white men who had been where Braddock intended to go. He knew the country, was acquainted with the Indians and had fought the French. A few weeks later Washington and Braddock dined together at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg. According to British army regulations commissioned regular officers always outranked provincial officers. Under such circumstances if Lieutenant Colonel Washington served with Braddock he would be subject to the orders of junior regular officers. This, he told Braddock, was unacceptable. Desperate to have Washington Braddock engineered a face saving solution. Washington could accompany him as a member of his official family.

It took Braddock's army of 3000 men nearly two months to reach Cumberland, Maryland. Washington was beside himself. At this rate he estimated it would take at least two more months to reach the Ohio. He urged Braddock to leave his main force behind and push ahead with a flying column of 800 men. Braddock agreed and took Washington with him. After an agonizing march on July 9th the column crossed the Monongahela. Only a few miles from their final objective Braddock ordered the colors broken out and instructed the band to strike up the "Grenadiers March."

For weeks Contrecoeur's scouts had been providing detailed reports of the British advance. He and his second in command Captain Daniel Beaujeu agreed that the fort was as good as lost. Their small garrison hunkered behind weak wooden walls could not hope to stand against Braddock's superior army and cannon. The French commanders decided to abandon their post but not before launching a surprise attack that they hoped might delay the enemy. Beaujeu set out with a force of soldiers and Indians to set an ambush for the British. His mission was to buy time; he never expected to win a battle.

As the British made their way through the forest with clocklike precision, Beaujeu and his mixed force hurried toward them. In the distance Beaujeu could hear the sound of drums and fifes and the noise of axes felling trees. Grenadiers, four abreast, marched steadily forward. Two hundred yards in front of the British column rode a small detachment of horsemen, and on either side flanking parties slashed their way through the undergrowth

Suddenly the French burst from the woods. In an unexpected meeting engagement Beaujeu's and Braddock's advance guard suddenly found themselves facing one another. A British soldier called out "The Indians was upon us." A hot fire ensued, Beaujeu waved his cap in the air and his force split like a tuning g fork and came down alongside the British column. Washington was with Braddock when the firing broke out. Both men rode to the sound of the guns.

Braddock and Washington were in the heat of the battle the whole time. The general had four horses shot out from under him. For nearly an hour and a half he rode amid the disintegrating ranks of his soldiers ordering them to form up. By mid afternoon with nearly half his men dead or wounded Braddock gave the order to retreat. He was on his fifth mount when a ball tore into his right side. The wound was mortal.

Every one of Braddock's senior officers were either wounded or killed. Washington alone remained unhurt. He later described what he saw as he rode through the bloody tangled mass of fleeing soldiers – "The dead – the dying – the groans – lamentations – and crys along the Road of the wounded for help – were enough to pierce the heart."

Later Washington was harsh in his criticism of the soldiers' behavior. Betraying his own personal biases, he praised his fellow Virginians and the gallant British officers but condemned the enlisted ranks as cowards "Sheep pursued by dogs." He praised Braddock, however, as an officer who was "brave even to a fault."

Having commanded one disaster and participated in another Washington might have expected the wrath of public opinion to fall upon him. Instead, however, he emerged as a colonial hero whose brave exploits grew with each retelling of the battle on the Monongahela.

While Washington received public acclaim what he did not receive was recognition from those he admired most – officers in the regular army. He longed for them to honor his provincial rank. It simply would not happen. That troubled him deeply. He had, he wrote to his half brother Augustine, served for two years and in that time he had received only "trifling pay," sacrificed his health, lost a good many of his possessions, and barely escaped with his life, yet he was still, in the eyes of British officers, only a provincial. Washington's pride was wounded.

With Braddock's defeat and the hasty retreat of his battered army the entire Virginia frontier was exposed to French and Indian attack. Dinwiddie used that threat as a lever to pry funds from an ordinarily parsimonious and recalcitrant House of Burgesses. They appropriated L 40,000 and gave the governor authority to recruit a regiment of 1200 soldiers to secure the colony's frontier from attack. To command the regiment there could be no other choice than Washington. Under the circumstances, however, Washington needed to be cajoled to take command, and so the Governor set out to court the Colonel. Dinwiddie offered to pay for what Washington had lost on his three pervious trips to Ohio. He would also provide a "military chest" for his future expenses and most

importantly, Washington would have a say in appointing regimental officers. Under these conditions Washington accepted the commission.

Virginia was the first American colony to form a regiment of full time soldiers. Unlike the usual colonial militia these men were not part time soldiers. Washington recruited, organized, drilled and trained his men in the European fashion. He recommended that his officers read the most current military treatises and he insisted that his men dress in proper uniforms – provincial blue. He told Dinwiddie "if it shou'd be said, the Troops of Virginia are Irregulars, and cannot expect more notice than other Provincials, I must beg leave to differ, and observe in turn, that we want nothing but Commissions from His Majesty, to make us as regular a Corps as any upon the Continent." Unfortunately, Washington and his offices would continue to want commissions.

In the face of outcries from the frontier the Governor ordered Washington to divide his regiment into small units and post them along a line running down the Shenandoah Valley in the hopes of thwarting Indian raids. Washington protested arguing that rather than wait for the enemy to attack the only sure way of protecting Virginia was to wipe out the viper's nest at Fort Duquesne. Dinwiddie rejected his advice and Washington, like a good soldier, obeyed. Indeed Washington was a good soldier, and it was during this time that he became an even better one. Unlike British army commanders Washington had no elaborate bureaucracy to depend upon. He oversaw nearly everything. He ordered the uniforms, paid the bills, checked the supplies, listened to officers' complaints,

monitored his men’s medical care and a saw to a host of other duties which flowed into his headquarters.

The administrative work load was enormous, a burden made even heavier by incessant inquiries from Williamsburg. In private he grumbled about the “chimney – corner politicians,” but he never questioned their authority, and made every effort to appease them. Even when he became convinced “it would give pleasure to the Governor to hear that I was involved in trouble,” he obeyed his orders. The colonel of the Virginia regiment valued the principal of civilian authority over the military.

It was also during this time that Washington learned to toughen his hide against political attacks. When the governor attempted to cut his pay he held his temper and politely explained to Dinwiddie his position. He learned to shrug off rumors that accused him of “loose behaviour and [being] remissness of duty.” He dismissed “stupid scandal” that “has made free with my character.” “I have foibles,” he told Dinwiddie, “perhaps many of them, …but no man, that ever was employed in a public capacity, has endeavoured to discharge the trust reposed in him with greater honesty, and more zeal for this country’s interest, than I have done.”

Duty “upon our cold and Barren Frontiers” took a heavy toll on Washington’s health. On Braddock’s expedition Washington was taken down by what appears to have been dysentery. In late summer 1757 those same symptoms returned and by fall he had left his command and was home at Mount Vernon. In January 1758 he tried to take the field

again, but suffered a serious relapse. He wrote to his friend Colonel John Stanwix that he had “been reduced to great extremity, and have now much reason to apprehend an approaching decay.” “I now have,” he continued “no prospect left of preferment in the military way, and as I despair of rendering that immediate service, which my country may require from the Person Commanding their Troops, I have some thoughts of quitting my command, and retiring from all Public Business.” As a last hope to recover his health in mid March Washington endured a painful trip to Williamsburg to consult with the town’s best physician, Doctor John Amson. We may never know what Amson prescribed but whatever it was it seems to have worked. Washington’s recovery may also been aided by news that an army of 7000 men had been dispatched from England under the command of General James Forbes. According to rumor Forbes’s target was a place much familiar to Washington - Fort Duquesne. Twice defeated there Washington yearned to return to that “hapless spot that proved so fatal to so many …brave companions.” Washington rose to the promise of battle. His health improved. He may also have been responding to love for it was while he was recovering that he met a 26 year old well to do widow Martha Custis. A few days after their first encounter Washington wrote to his cousin that he was “now in a fair way of regaining my health.”

Forbes’s campaign against Fort Duquesne was part of a grand three pronged British strategy to defeat the French in North America. As Forbes advanced on Duquesne General James Abercromby was to close on Fort Ticonderoga as General Jeffrey Amherst assaulted Louisbourg.

Washington began politicking for a command. First he wrote to his friend Stanwix to assure him that he was fit to serve and asked him to "mention me in favorable terms to General Forbes." He wanted, he told Stanwix, to be certain that Forbes would distinguish him "from the common run of provincial officers, as I understand there will be a motley herd of us."

Forbes did indeed distinguish Washington from the "motley herd." He described him as "a good and knowing officer in the Back Countries" and ordered him to bring his regiment to join the expedition. Washington was elated.

Originally trained in medicine Forbes moved his army with the precision of a surgeon. He was determined not to repeat Braddock's mistake of pushing forward on too thin a line, too far ahead of support. Methodical and efficient, Forbes laid out his wilderness march in a textbook manner, carefully following the doctrine of "protected advance." To Washington's horror, however, the "advance" was not going to be along Braddock's road through Virginia but on a more northerly route passing through Pennsylvania. This was the work, Washington was convinced of Virginia's "Crafty Neighbors" namely Pennsylvania and Maryland who, he believed had secretly persuaded Forbes to cut a new road through their colonies to the west thereby bypassing Virginia. "All is lost" Washington exclaimed in a particularly intemperate letter he wrote to the Speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses. Uncharacteristically blunt, almost insubordinate, Washington made his views clear to Forbes. Taken aback Forbes rebuked Washington for being so attached to Virginia that He would declare "so publickly in favour of one road

without knowing anything of the other." The general roared that he did not care "one single twopence" about "provincial interest[s]."

Despite Washington's misgivings Forbes's plan succeeded and the fall of Fort Duquesne marked the end of French power in the Ohio. To the north General Amherst had captured Louisbourg laying open the route to Quebec City to be pursued by General James Wolfe in the coming year. General Abercromby on the other hand, had suffered a humiliating defeat at Ticonderoga, but that set back was only temporary for even in victory the French had been forced go withdraw. The war in America was coming to a close.

The struggle had been hard on Washington. For nearly 6 years he had served his king and colony. He had become the most famous man in Virginia, but now he wanted nothing more than to return home. He planned to marry Martha Custis, and she wanted a planter for a husband and a father for her children, not a soldier.

When his officers learned that their colonel was retiring they offered Washington their own farewell address.

> How sensibly we must be Affected with the loss of such an excellent Commander, such a sincere Friend, and so affable a Companion. How rare it is to find those amiable Qualifications blended together in one Man? Adieu to that Superiority, which the enemy has granted us over other Troops. Adieu to that Discipline and order, which you have always maintained. Adieu to that happy Union and

> Harmony, which has been our principle Cement! Where will we meet a man so experienced in military affairs?

Having spent nearly six years in the demanding school of war Washington had learned a great many things. He had learned how to lead men in battle, to console them in defeat, rejoice with them in victory. He had learned how to deal with a civilian government that seemed to understand little about soldiers in the field. He had learned how important good discipline, fairly invoked, was to the men in the ranks. He had learned how vital it was to deal justly with his officers and avoid any hint of favoritism.

Two things he did not learn from this demanding curriculum were courage and integrity for they were always present; embedded in his character.

In February Washington entered the House of Burgesses as a newly elected member. Almost as soon as he took his seat the body resolved by unanimous vote

that the thanks of the House be given to George Washington, Esq., a member of this House, late Colonel of the First Virginia Regiment, for his faithful services to His Majesty, and this Colony, and for his brave and steady behavior, from the first Encroachments and hostilities of the French and their Indians, to his resignation, after the happy reduction of Fort Duquesne.

Washington stood and blushed. When he tried to respond he hesitated and for a moment was at a loss for words. The Speaker, recognizing the embarrassment the house had heaped upon him rose, and looking at Washington said "Sit down Mr. Washington. Your modesty is equal to your valor, and that surpasses the power of any language that I possess." George Washington had become an American hero.