

PUBLICATION OF WASHINGTON'S JOURNAL AND ITS EFFECT UPON
THE COLONIES – THERE SUBSEQUENT ACTION

No doubt longer remained of the intention of the French in their movements. Washington's Journal was ordered to be published, to arouse the people and excite their indignation. It was reprinted in nearly all the newspapers of the colonies, republished in London, and extensively read.*

Immediate arrangements were made in Virginia, to arrest the progress of the French. The Governor and Council resolved to enlist two companies, of one hundred men each, and send them to the Ohio, with orders to construct a fort on that river. The command of the two companies was given to Washington, who was appointed Major, without a dissenting voice. One company was to be raised by himself, and the other by Captain Trent, who was to collect his men among the traders and back settlers, and proceed immediately to the place of destination. Major Washington, in the meantime, was stationed at Alexandria, till the other company should be completed, and the proper military supplies forwarded to this place.**

“To facilitate the enlistment of the number of troops wanted, Governor Dinwiddie issued a proclamation, granting five thousand acres of land on the Ohio river, to be divided among those who should be engaged in this expedition. One thousand acres were to be laid off contiguous to the fort, at the junction of the Monongahela and the Allegheny, for the use of the soldiers doing duty there, to be called the garrison lands.”†

“The reasons assigned by the Governor to the ministers for making this grant were, that he hoped the soldiers would become permanent settlers, and that it was better to secure the lands by such a bounty, than to allow the French to take quiet possession of as many millions of acres as he had granted thousands. His proclamation was sanctioned by the King, but it was not well received in another quarter. The Assembly of Pennsylvania took alarm at the freedom with which the lands, situated as they said in that province, were given away. Governor Hamilton wrote an expostulatory letter. It was a perplexing case; but Governor Dinwiddie escaped from the difficulty by replying, that the claims of Pennsylvania were at least doubtful, the boundary line not having been run; that the object in view equally concerned the provinces; that his grant did not necessarily imply future jurisdiction, and that, if the Pennsylvania jurisdiction should be established, the quitrents might eventually be paid to the proprietary instead of the crown.”

When Capt. Trent had raised a party of men, he set out for the junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny, for the purpose of speedily erecting the fort. Major Washington remained behind, actively engaged in raising the requisite number of men which were to follow, and ably garrison the fort when erected.‡

The Virginia Assembly then voted ten thousand pounds towards supporting the expedition, and the Governor was induced to increase the military force to three hundred men, divided into six companies and Col. Joshua Fry was appointed to command the whole. Major Washington was in consequence raised to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The cannon and other military equipments which had recently arrived from England, were sent to Alexandria, for the use of the expedition.

Col. Washington marched from Alexandria on the 2d day of April, with two companies of troops, arrived at Will's creek, where the town of Cumberland no stands, on the 17th of April, having been joined on his route by a detachment under Capt. Stephen.

The detachment under Capt. Trent, arrived at the junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny, on the 17th day of February,§ and on the 16th of April, 1754, was engaged in the erection of the fort, when Contrecoeur, at the head of a large French force, suddenly appeared before the fort.¶ Very little progress had been made in the work. Capt. Trent was absent at Will's creek, and Lieut Frazer, as absent at his residence, ten miles up the Monongahela. Ensign Ward, therefore, was left in command, and the whole number of his men amounted to forty-one.¶

*Spark's Washington, Vol. II, p. 432.

** Spark's Washington, Vol. II, p. 1.

† History of the Backwoods, pp. 64-65.

‡ History of the Backwoods, p. 64.

§ Maryland Gazette, March 14, 1755.

¶ After taking possession of the fort, the French Commenced an immediate enlargement and completion of it. See Stoba's plan, and his and M'Kinney's description of it, in the early history of Pittsburgh.

¶ Spark's Washington, Vol. II, p. 4, 6, 7.

Contrecoeur approached within a short distance of the fort, and sent an officer with a summons to surrender, the particulars of which will be found in the following letters from Col. Washington to the Governors of Virginia and Pennsylvania.