



The French and Indian War



¹ In 1754, George Washington was a young Virginian, and the United States was not yet a country. In that year, Washington was sent west by the governor of Virginia to take care of a problem on the frontier.

² The problem Washington was sent to take care of was located in the Ohio Valley, the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. English settlers from Virginia, who were beginning to think about settling more land, had formed the Ohio Company and made plans to expand westward. At the same time, the French were also expanding into the Ohio Valley area in hope of expanding their fur-trading network. Native Americans had occupied the area all along. The problem was that all three groups had claims to the same land.

³ George Washington, a 22 year-old Major in the Virginia militia, had a mission. His mission was to tell the French to leave the Ohio Territory because the British had already staked a claim.

⁴ The French didn't go away. In fact, they had already built a fort, Fort Duquesne. The French had many forts along their frontier with the British, but Fort Duquesne where three important rivers in came together in the Ohio Valley.

⁵ To counter the French moves in the region, George Washington and his men built a fort nearby. Fort Necessity, as it was called, was small - only 53 feet in diameter. Its wooden palisades were built of split logs. Surrounding the fort itself were earth trenches from which the

men tried to defend the fort. The French and their Indian allies attacked the hastily constructed fort. Washington and his men were unprepared.

⁶ Several skirmishes took place in the area. The battles around Fort Necessity were the first battles of the French and Indian War, even though neither side, the British or the French, had declared war yet.

⁷ Even though war had not been declared, the battles between the French and the British were getting a lot of publicity. Newspapers published news reports of French troops marching down from Canada. They published reports of a French plan to take over the whole area. The British brought troops from England and Washington was sent on another mission as a guide for the British forces. A Maryland newspaper published accounts of the battles taken from George Washington's own journal.

⁸ The newspapers began to call for the colonies to unite to defend themselves against the French and the Indians. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* published a picture of a snake cut into parts. Each part represented one of the thirteen colonies, and the caption said "JOIN or DIE."

⁹ In 1756, the war became official. From 1756 through 1763, the French and the British fought over land in America. Each side was supported by several Indian tribes at various times. At first, the French seemed to be winning, but after the first two years, the British began to gain the upper hand. They captured several French forts and settlements in what is now the United States and Canada. In 1759, the French fortress city of Quebec fell to the British. The following year, the British captured Montreal. One by one, French forts along the frontier were taken by the British.

¹⁰ In 1763, the French and Indian War ended in America. The Seven Years War, which was the name of the same war in Europe, was finished too. The Treaty of Paris, signed at the end of the war, gave all of North America east of the Mississippi, except New Orleans, to Britain. France had lost much of its hold on North America. Many of the Native Americans in the area accepted treaties with the British or moved further west.

¹¹ The British colonists entered into a new phase of their life in America. The years of the French and Indian War had transformed the original thirteen colonies and the westward settlements. They were no longer only separate colonies and British subjects. The colonists were starting to think of themselves as Americans. They were becoming a large and united group of people that could look out for itself. The French and Indian War had begun to shape a future United States.
