

THE CAPTURE OF THE FORKS OF THE OHIO BY THE FRENCH AS
SHOWN IN THE LETTERS OF WASHINGTON TO THE
GOVERNORS OF PENNSYLVANIA AND VIRGINIA

WILL'S CREEK, 25th April, 1754.

SIR: - Capt. Trent's ensign, Mr. Ward, has this day arrived from the fork of the Monongahela, and brings the disagreeable account, that to fort, on the 18th instant, was surrendered at the summons of Monsieur Contrecoeur to a body of French, consisting of upwards of one thousand men, who came from Venango with eighteen pieces of cannon, sixty bateaux, and three canoes. They gave him liberty to bring off all his men and working tools, which he accordingly did the same day.

Immediately upon this information I called a council of war, to advise on proper measures to be taken in this exigency. A copy of their resolves, with the proceedings, I herewith inclose by the bearer, whom I have continued express to you Honor for more minute intelligence.

Mr. Ward has the summons with him, and a speech from Half-King, which I also enclose, with the wampum. He is accompanied by one of the Indians mentioned therein, who were sent to see where we were, what was our strength, and to know the time to expect us out. The other young men I have prevailed upon to return the Half-King with the following speech:

"Sachems, Warriors of the Six United Nations, Shannoahs, and Delawares, our friends and brothers: I received your speech by Buck's brother (Mr. Ward), who came to us with the two young men five sleeps after leaving you. We return you thanks from hearts glowing with affection for your steadfast adherence to us, for you kind speech, and for your wise councils and directions to the Buck's brother.

"The young man will inform you where he met a small part of our army advancing towards you, clearing the road for a great number of our warriors, who are immediately to follow with our great guns, our ammunition and provisions.

"I could not delay to let you know our hearts, and have sent back one of the young men with this speech to acquaint you with them. I have sent the other, according to your desire, to the Governor of Virginia, with the Buck's brother, to deliver your speech and wampum, and to be eye-witness of the preparations we are making to come in haste to support you, whose interest is dear to us as our lives. We resent the usage of the treacherous French, and our conduct will henceforth plainly show you how we have it at heart.

"I cannot be easy without seeing you before our forces meet at the fork of the road, and therefore I have the greatest desire that you and Escuniate, or one of you, should meet me on the road as soon as possible, to assist us in council.

"To assure you of the good will we bear you, and to confirm the truth of what has been said, I herewith present you a string of wampum, that you may thereby remember how much I am your brother and friend."

I hope my proceedings in these affairs will be satisfactory to you honor, as I have, to the utmost of my knowledge, consulted the interest of the expedition and good of my country; whose rights, while they are asserted in so just a cause, I will defend to the last remains of life.

Hitherto the difficulties I have met with in marching have been greater than I expect to encounter on the Ohio, when possibly I may be surrounded by the enemy; and these difficulties have been occasioned by those, who, had they acted as becomes every good subject, would have exerted their utmost abilities to forward our just designs. Out of seventy-four wagons impressed and Winchester, we got but ten, after waiting a week, and some of those so badly provided with teams, that the soldiers were obliged to assist them up the hills, although it was known they had better teams at home. I doubt not that in some points I may have strained the law; but hope, as my sole motive was to expedite the march, I shall be supported in it, should my authority be questioned, which at present I don't apprehend, unless some busy-body intermeddles.

Your Honor will see by the resolves in council, that I am destined to the Monongahela with all the diligent dispatch in my power. We will endeavor to make the road sufficiently good for the heaviest artillery to pass; and, when we arrive at Redstone creek, fortify ourselves as strongly as the short time will allow. I doubt not that we can maintain a possession there, till we are reinforced, unless the rising of the waters shall admit the enemy's cannon to be conveyed up in canoes, and then I flatter myself we shall not be so destitute of intelligence, as not to get timely notice of it, and make a good retreat.

I hope you will see the absolute necessity for our having, as soon as our forces are collected, a number of cannon, some of heavy metal, with mortars and grenades to attack the French, and put us on an equal footing with them.

Perhaps it may be thought advisable to invite the Cherokees, Catawbias and Chickasaws to march to our assistance, as we are informed that six hundred Chippewas and Ottawas are marching down Scioto creek to join the French, who are coming up the Ohio. In that case, I would beg leave to recommend their being ordered to this place first, that a peace may be concluded between them and the Six Nations; for I am informed by several persons, that, as no good harmony subsists between them, their coming first to the Ohio may create great disorder, and turn out much to our disadvantage.

As I had opportunities I wrote to the Governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania, acquainting them with these advices, and enclosed the summons and Indian speech, which I hope you will not think me to forward in doing. I considered that the Assembly of Maryland was to sit in a few days, that the Pennsylvania Assembly is now sitting, and that, by giving timely notice, something might be done in favor of the expedition, which now requires all the force we can muster.

By the best information I can get, I much doubt whether any of the Indians will be in to treat in May. Are the Indian women and children, if they settle amongst us, to be maintained at our expense? They will expect it. I have the honor to be, &c.,

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

To Governor Dinwiddie.

WILL'S CREEK, 27th April, 1754.

HONORABLE SIR: – It is with greatest concern I acquaint you, that Mr. Ward, Ensign in Captain Trent's company, was compelled to surrender his small fort in the Forks of Monongialo to the French, on the seventeenth instant (April), who fell down from Weningo (Venango), with a fleet of three hundred and sixty bateaux and canoes, with upwards of one thousand men and eighteen pieces of artillery, which they planted against the fort, drew up their men and sent the *enclosed summons* to Mr. Ward, who having but an inconsiderable number of men, and no cannon to make a proper defense, was obliged to surrender; They suffered him to draw off his men, arms and working tools, and gave leave that he might retreat to the inhabitants.

I have heard of your Honor's great zeal for his Majesty's service, and for all our interests on the present occasion. You will see by the enclosed speech of the Half-King, that the Indians expect some assistance from you; and I am persuaded you will take proper notice of their moving speech, and of their unshaken fidelity.

I thought it more advisable to acquaint your Honor with it immediately, than to wait till you could get intelligence by way of Williamsburg and the young man, as the Half-King proposes.

I have arrived thus far with a detachment of one hundred and fifty men; Col. Fry, with the remainder of the regiment and artillery, is daily expected. In the meantime, we advance slowly across the mountains, making roads as we march, fit for the carriages of our great guns, and are designed to proceed as far as the mouth of Redstone creek, which enters Monongalia about thirty-seven miles above the fort taken by the French, from whence we have a water-carriage down the river; and there is a stone house, built by the Ohio company, which may serve as a receptacle for our ammunition and provisions.

Beside these French that came from Weningo, we have credible accounts that another party are coming up Ohio. We also have intelligence that six hundred Chippewas and Ottoways are marching down *Scioto creek* to join them.

I hope your Honor will excuse the freedom I have assumed in acquainting you with these advices. It was the warm zeal I owe my country that influenced me to it, and occasioned this express.

I am, with all due respect and regard,

Your Honor's most obedient and very humble servant

GEO. WASHINGTON.

To Governor Hamilton, of Pennsylvania: