

BRADDOCK'S ARMY – THE MARCH, BATTLE AND RETREAT.

GENERAL BRADDOCK landed in Virginia on the 20th of February, 1755, with two regiments of the British army from Ireland, the Forty-fourth and Forty-eighth, each consisting of five hundred men, one of them commanded by Sir Peter Halket, and the other by Colonel Dunbar. To these were joined a suitable train of artillery, with military supplies and provisions. The General's first headquarters were at Alexandria, and the troops were stationed in that place and its vicinity till they marched for Will's creek.

One division of the army, consisting of the provincials and a part of the forty-fourth, set out on the 8th and 9th of April, under Sir Peter Halket, for Winchester, Virginia, whence a new road had been opened, and was nearly complete, to Cumberland, and arrived by that route at Will's creek, on the 10th of May. On the 18th of April, Colonel Dunbar, with the remainder of the army, bringing the artillery and stores, set out for Frederick, Maryland. Arriving there, it was found that there was no road to Will's creek, and Dunbar was compelled to cross the Potomac, at the mouth of the Conococheague, passed over the little Cacapon, and again ferried the Potomac at Ferry Fields. Thence on the river side, through Shawanee Old Town, or Skipton, the army passed the narrows, and on the 20th of May arrived at Cumberland.

In letters written at Will's creek, General Braddock, with much severity of censure, complained of the lukewarmness of the colonial governments, and tardiness of the people in facilitating his enterprise, the dishonesty of agents, and the faithlessness of contractors. The forces which he brought together at Will's creek, however, amounted to somewhat more than two thousand effective men, of whom about one thousand belonged to the royal regiments, and the remainder were furnished by the colonies. In this number were embraced the fragments of two independent companies from New York, one of which was commanded by Captain Gates, afterward a major-general in the Revolutionary war. Thirty sailors had also been granted for the expedition by Admiral Keppel, who commanded the squadron that brought over the two regiments.

At this post the army was detained three weeks, nor could it then have moved had it not been for the energetic personal services of Franklin, among the Pennsylvania farmers, in procuring horses and wagons to transport the artillery, provisions and baggage.

The details of the march were well described in Colonel Washington's letters. The army was separated into two divisions. The advanced division under General Braddock, consisted of twelve hundred men, besides officers. The other, under Colonel Dunbar, was left in the rear. To proceed by slower marches. On the 8th of July the General arrived with his division, all in excellent health and spirits, at the junction of the Youhioghenny and Monongahela rivers. At this place Colonel Washington joined the advanced division, being but partially recovered from a severe attack of fever, which had been the cause of his remaining behind. The officers and soldiers were now in the highest spirits, and firm in the conviction that they should, within a few hours, victoriously enter the wall of Fort Du Quesne.

The steep and rugged grounds on the north side of the Monongahela prevented the army from marching in that direction, and it was necessary in approaching the fort, now about fifteen miles distant, to ford the river twice, and march part of the way on the south side. Early on the morning of the 9th all things were in readiness, and the whole train passed through the river, a little below the mouth of the Youhioghenny, and proceeded in perfect order along the southern margin of the Monongahela.

Washington was to often heard to say during his lifetime, that the most beautiful spectacle that he ever beheld was the display of the British troops on this eventful morning. Every man was neatly dressed in full uniform, the soldiers were arranged in columns and marched in exact order, the sun gleamed from their burnished arms, the river flowed tranquilly on their right, and the deep forest overshadowed them with solemn grandeur on their left. Officers and men were equally inspired with cheering hopes and confident anticipation.

In this manner, they marched forward 'till about noon, when they arrived at the second crossing place, ten miles from Fort Du Quesne. They halted but a little time, and then began to ford the river, and regain its northern bank. As soon as they had crossed, they came up on a level plain, elevated but a few feet above the surface of the river, and extending northward nearly half a mile from its margin. Then commenced a gradual ascent at an angle of about three degrees, which terminated in hills of a considerable height, at no great distance beyond. The road from the fording place to Fort Du Quesne, led across the plain and up this ascent and thence proceeded through an uneven country, at that time covered with woods.

By order of the march a body of three hundred men, under Colonel Gage, afterward General Gage, of Boston memory, made the advanced party, which was immediately followed by another of two hundred. Next came the general with the columns of artillery, the main body of the army, and the baggage. At one

o'clock the whole had passed the river, and almost at this moment a sharp firing was heard upon the advanced parties, who were now ascending the hill, and had got forward about a hundred yards from the termination of the plain. A heavy discharge of musketry was poured in upon their front, which was the first intelligence they had of their proximity, and this was suddenly followed by another on the right flank. They were filled with great consternation, as no enemy was in sight, and the firing seemed to proceed from an invisible foe. They fired in their turn, however, but quite at random, and obviously, without effect, as the enemy kept up a discharge in quick, continued succession.

The general advanced speedily to the relief of these detachments, but before he could reach the spot which they occupied, they gave way and fell back upon the artillery and the other columns of the army, causing extreme confusion, and striking the whole mass with such a panic, that no order could afterwards be restored. The General and the officers behaved with the utmost courage, and used every effort to rally the men, and bring them to order, but all in vain. In this state they continued nearly three hours, huddling together in confused bodies, firing irregularly, shooting down their own officers and men, and doing no perceptible harm to the enemy. The Virginia provincials were the only troops who seemed to retain their senses, and they behaved with a bravery and resolution worthy of a better fate. They adopted the Indian mode, and fought each man for himself behind a tree. This was prohibited by the General, who endeavored to form his men into platoons and columns, as it they had been manoeuvring on the plains of Flanders. Meantime, the French and Indians, concealed in the ravines and behind trees, kept up a deadly and unceasing discharge of musketry, singling out their objects, taking deliberate aim, and producing a carnage almost unparalleled in the annals of modern warfare. More than half of the whole army, which crossed the river in so proud an array only three hours before, were killed or wounded; the General himself had received a mortal wound, and many of his best officers had fallen by his side.

In describing the action a few days afterward, Colonel Orme wrote the Governor of Pennsylvania: "The men were so extremely deaf to the exhortations of the General and the officers, that they fired away, in the most irregular manner, all their ammunition, and then ran off, leaving to the enemy the artillery, ammunition, provisions and baggage; nor could they be persuaded to stop till they had got as far as Grist's plantation, nor there only in part, many of them proceeding as far as Colonel Dunbar's party, who lay six miles on this side. The officers were absolutely sacrificed by their good behavior, advancing sometimes in bodies, sometimes separately, hoping by such example to engage the soldiers to follow them, but to no purpose. The General had five horses shot under him, and at last received a wound through his right arm into his lungs, of which he died the 13th instant. Secretary Shirley was shot through the head; Captain Morris, wounded; Colonel Washington had two horses shot from under him, and his clothes shot through in several places, behaving the whole time with the greatest courage and resolution. Sir Peter Halket was killed upon the spot. Colonel Burton and Sir John St. Clair were wounded."

In addition to these, the other field officers wounded were Lieutenant-Colonel Gage, (afterward so well known as the commander of the British forces in Boston, at the beginning of the Revolution,) Colonel Orme, Major Sparks, and Brigade Major Halket. Ten Captains were killed and twenty-two wounded. The whole number of officers in the engagement was eighty-six, of whom twenty-six were killed and thirty-seven wounded. The killed and wounded of the privates amounted to seven hundred and fourteen. Of these, at least one half were supposed to be killed. Their bodies left on the field of action, were stripped and scalped by the Indians. All the artillery, ammunition, provisions, and baggage, everything in the train of the army, fell into the enemies hands, and were given up to be pillaged by the savages. General Braddock's papers were also taken, among which were his instructions and correspondence with the ministry after his arrival in Virginia. The same fate befell the papers of Colonel Washington, including a private journal and his official correspondence during his campaign of the preceding year.

M. de Contrecoeur, the Commander of Fort Duquesne, received early intelligence of the arrival of General Braddock and the British regiments in Virginia. After his removal from Wills' creek, French and Indian scouts were constantly abroad, who watched his motions, reported the progress of his march and the route he was pursuing. His army was represented to consist of three thousand men. M. de Contrecoeur was hesitating what measures to take, believing his small force wholly inadequate to encounter so formidable an enemy. When M. de Beaujeu, a captain in the French service, proposed to head a detachment of French and Indians, and meet the enemy in their march. The consent of the Indians was first obtained. A large body of them was then encamped in the vicinity of the fort, and M. De Beaujeu opened to them his plan, and requested their aid. This they at first declined, giving as reason, the superior force of the enemy, and the impossibility of success. But at the pressing solicitation of M. de Beaujeu, they agreed to hold a council on the subject, and talk with him again the next morning. They still adhered to their first

decision, and when M. de Beaujeu went among them to inquire the result of their deliberations, they told him a second time they could not go. This was a severe disappointment to M. de Beaujeu, who had his heart set upon the enterprise, and was resolved to prosecute it. Being a man of great good nature, affability, and ardor, and much beloved by the savages, he said to the: "I am determined to go out and meet the enemy. What! will you suffer your father to go out alone? I am sure we shall conquer." With this spirited Harangue, delivered in a manner that pleased the Indians, and won upon their confidence, he subdued their unwillingness, and they agreed to accompany him.

It was now on the 7th of July, and news came that the English were within six leagues of the fort. This day and the next were spent in making preparations and reconnoitering the ground for attack. Two other captains, Dumas and Liquery, were joined with M. de Beaujeu, and also four lieutenants, six ensigns, and two cadets. On the morning of the 9th they were all in readiness, and began their march at an early hour. It seems to have been their first intention, to make a stand at the ford, and annoy the English while crossing the river, and then retreat to the ambuscade on the side of the hill, where the contest actually commenced. The trees on the bank of the river afforded a good opportunity to effect this measure, and the Indian mode of warfare, since the artillery could be of little avail against an enemy, where every man was protected by a tree, and at the same time the English would be exposed to appoint blank musket shot in fording the river. As it happened, however, M. de Beaujeu and his party did not arrive in time to execute this part of the plan.

The English were preparing to cross the river, when the French and Indians reached the defiles on the rising ground, where they posted themselves, and waited until Braddock's advanced columns came up. This was the signal for the attack, which was made at first in front, and repelled by so heavy a discharge from the British, that the Indians believed it proceeded from artillery, and showed symptoms of wavering and retreat. At this moment M. de Beaujeu was killed, and the command devolving upon M. Dumas, he showed great presence of mind in rallying the Indians, and ordered his officers to lead them to the wings and attack the enemy in the flank, while he with the French troops would maintain the position in front. This order was promptly obeyed, and the attack became general. The action was warm and severely contested for a short time; but the English fought in the European method, firing at random, which had little effect in the woods, while the Indians fired from concealed places, took aim, and almost every shot brought down a man. The English columns soon got into confusion; the yell of the savages, with which the woods resounded, struck terror into the hearts of the soldiers, till at length they took flight, and resisted all the endeavors of their officers to restore any degree of order in their escape. The rout was complete, and the field of battle was left covered with dead and wounded, and all the artillery, ammunition, provisions and baggage of the British army. The Indians gave themselves up to pillage, which prevented them from pursuing the English in their flight.

Such is the substance of the accounts written at the time by the French officers, and sent home to their government. In regard to the numbers engaged there are some slight variations in the three statements. The largest reported is two hundred and fifty French and Canadians, and six hundred Indians. If we take a medium, it will make the whole number led out by M. de Beaujeu at least eight hundred and fifty. In an imperfect return, three officers were stated to have been killed, and four wounded; about thirty soldiers and Indians killed, and as many wounded. When these facts are taken into view, the result of the action will appear much less wonderful than has generally been supposed. And this wonder will still be diminished, when another circumstance is recurring to, worthy of particular consideration, and that is, the shape of the ground upon which the battle was fought. This part of the description, so essential to the understanding of military operations, and above all in the present instance, has never been touched upon, it is believed, by one writer. We have seen that Braddock's advanced columns, after crossing the valley, extending nearly half a mile from the margin of the river, began to move up the hill, so uniform in its ascent, that it was little less than an inclined surface of a somewhat crowning form. Down this inclined surface extended two ravines, beginning near together, at about one hundred and fifty yards from the bottom of the hill, and proceeding in different direct- till they terminated in the valley below. In these ravines, the French and Indians were concealed and protected. At this day they are from eight to ten feet deep, and sufficient in extent to contain at least ten thousand men. At this time of the battle, the ground was covered with trees and long grass, so that the ravines were entirely hidden from view, till they were approached within a few feet. Indeed, at the present day, although the place is cleared from trees, and converted into pasture, they are perceptible only at a very short distance. By this knowledge of the local peculiarities of the battle ground, the mystery that the British conceived themselves to be contending with an invisible foe, is solved. Such was literally the fact. They were so paraded between the ravines, that their whole front and right flank were exposed to the incessant fire of the enemy, who discharged their muskets over the edge of the

ravines, concealed during the operation by the grass and bushes, and protected by an invisible barrier below the surface of the earth. William Butler, a veteran soldier, who was in this action, and afterward at the Plains of Abraham, said, "We could only tell where the enemy was by the smoke of their muskets." A few scattering Indians were behind trees, and some were killed venturing out to take scalps, but much the larger portion fought wholly in the ravines.

It is not probable that either General Braddock, or any one of his officers, suspected the actual situation of the enemy during the whole bloody contest. It was a fault with the General, for which no apology can be offered, that he did not keep scouts and guards in advance, and on the wings of the army, who would have made the proper discoveries before the whole had been brought into the snare. This neglect was the primary cause of his defeat, which might have been avoided. Had he charged with the bayonet, the ravine would have been cleared instantly; or had he brought his artillery to the points where the ravines terminated in the valley, and scoured them with grape shot, the same consequence would have followed.

But the total insubordination of his troops would have prevented both these movements, even if he had become acquainted with the ground in the early part of the action. The disasters of this day, and the fate of the commander, brave and resolute as he undoubtedly was, are to be ascribed to his contempt of Indian warfare, his overweening confidence in the prowess of veteran troops, his obstinate self-complacency, his disregard of prudent counsel, and his negligence in leaving his army exposed to a surprise on their march. He freely consulted Colonel Washington, whose experience and judgment, notwithstanding his youth, claimed the highest respect for his opinions; but the General gave little heed to his advice. While on his march, George Croghan, the Indian interpreter, joined him with one hundred friendly Indians, who offered their services. These were accepted in so cold a manner, and the Indians themselves treated with so much neglect, that they deserted him, one after another. Washington pressed upon him the importance of these men, and the necessity of conciliating and retaining them, but without effect.

When the battle was over, and the remnants of Braddock's army had gained, in their flight, the opposite bank of the river, Colonel Washington was dispatched by the General to meet Colonel Dunbar, and order forward wagons for the wounded with all possible speed. But it was not till the 11th, after they had reached Gist's plantation, with great difficulty and much suffering from hunger, that any arrived. The General was first brought off in a tumbrel; he was next put on horseback, but being unable to ride, was obliged to be carried by the soldiers.

They all reached Dunbar's camp, to which the panic had already extended, and the day was passed there in great confusion. The artillery was destroyed, and the public stores and heavy baggage were burnt; by whose order was never known. They moved forward on the 13th, and that night General Braddock died, and was buried on the road for the purpose of concealing his body from the Indians. The spot is still pointed out, within a few yards of the present National road, about a mile west of the site of Fort Necessity, at the Great Meadows. Captain Stewart, of the Virginia forces, had taken particular charge of him from the time he was wounded till his death. On the 17th the sick and wounded arrived at Fort Cumberland, and were soon after joined by Colonel Dunbar, with the remaining fragments of the army.

The French sent out a party as far as Dunbar's camp, and destroyed everything that was left. Colonel Washington, being in very feeble health, proceeded in a few days to Mount Vernon.

Although the doings of 1755 could no be looked on as of a very amicable character, war was not declared by either France or England until May, the following year; and even then France was the last to proclaim the contest which she had been so long carrying on, though more than three hundred of her merchant vessels had been taken by British privateers. The causes of this proceeding are not very clear. France thought, beyond doubt, that George would fear to declare war, because Hanover was so exposed to attack; but why the British movements upon the sea particularly, did not lead to the declaration on the part of France, is not easily suggested. Early in 1756, however, both kingdoms formed alliances in Europe. France with Austria, Russia and Sweden; England with the great Frederick. And then commenced the seven years war, wherein most of Europe, North America, and the East and West Indies, partook and suffered.