

# Carlyle House

## DOCENT DISPATCH

April, 2008

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

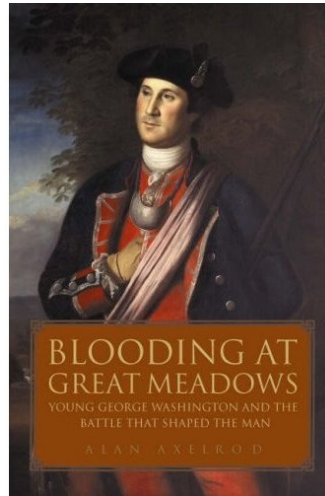
### Bleeding at Great Meadows: Young George Washington and the Battle that Shaped the Man: A Book Review by Bob Madison

Alan Axelrod's book, *Bleeding at Great Meadow: Young George Washington and the Battle that Shaped the Man*, covers the two years in George Washington's life, 1753 and 1754, immediately preceding General Edward Braddock's arrival at Carlyle House in March 1755. George Washington's exploits during those eventful two years set the stage for General Braddock's expedition to America.

The book opens with a discussion of Washington's early life, including his deep admiration for his older half-brother Lawrence Washington (John Carlyle's brother-in-law) and his early career as a professional surveyor, showing how this prepared and led George to a fledgling military career. The book also summarizes the early North American wars that are ignored by most historians and that preceded and led to the French and Indian War.

Lawrence Washington had been adjutant general of Virginia, in charge of maintaining Virginia's militia. When Lawrence Washington died in 1752, young George Washington asked Virginia Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie for Lawrence's old job. However, the job was divided into four regions. Despite the fact that Washington was only 21 and had absolutely no military experience, he soon secured the post of adjutant of the Southern district and several months later the post of adjutant of the Northern Neck. Washington immediately began reading all he could about being a military man.

Lawrence Washington had been president of the Ohio Company (John Carlyle was one of the original members of the Ohio Company), so young George Washington was well acquainted with the objectives of that organization. When Lawrence Washington died, Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie became president of the Ohio Company. Thus, Dinwiddie had financial as well as government interests in keeping the French out



of the Ohio territory. Virginia newspapers carried accounts of how the French were building forts in that area, but nobody in Williamsburg knew exactly what they were doing or how many soldiers they had. In October 1753, George Washington visited Dinwiddie and offered to carry a warning to the French as well as gather all the military intelligence he could. The Council of Virginia swiftly approved Washington's appointment, drafting a warning letter to be delivered to the French and commissioning him on October 31, 1753. He left the same day.

The expedition proved harrowing, through mountainous terrain, swollen rivers, snow, and freezing rain. Washington also had to negotiate with the Indians, many of whom now supported the French. When he reached a French fortified house at Venango, the French soldiers told him, "it was their absolute Design to take Possession of the Ohio, & by G-- they wou'd do it." There he gathered valuable intelligence from drunken French soldiers regarding Indian alliances and the locations and numbers of French troops. Washington was escorted from Venango to Fort Le Boeuf by Commissary La Force, a highly influential figure in French-Indian relations and an ancestor of Carlyle House docent Melanie La Force (see her "Michel Pepin dit La Force and John Carlyle: A Link to the Seven Years' War" in the April 2007 *Docent Dispatch*).

They reached Fort Le Boeuf on December 11,

#### CARLYLE HOUSE

*Mary Ruth Coleman, Director*  
*Jim Bartlinski, Curator*  
*Sarah Arnold, Curator of Education*



1753. After several days delay, the governor's letter was delivered, and the French officers replied that they would stay on the Ohio in accordance with their orders from their superiors in Canada. Washington had ascertained the French intentions and gathered a wealth of intelligence about their state of military preparedness. Now he had to rapidly return to Williamsburg with the news. It was a difficult trip. When the horses grew too weak, they had to continue on foot through miles of frozen, snow-deep woods. They had treacherous Indians try to lead them in the wrong direction. They had to build rafts to cross icy rivers. At one point, he fell into the icy river and had to wade to shore. One month to the day after he left Fort Le Boeuf, Washington reported to Dinwiddie in Williamsburg on January 16, 1754. His 7,000 word report was published and widely distributed.

Five days after Washington's return, with the intention of driving out the French, Dinwiddie directed him to recruit 100 men into active militia service. At the same time, he asked Captain William Trent to enlist an additional 100 men. Recruiting proved difficult, and the goals were never achieved. Washington was appointed second in command (at considerably lower pay than desired) of the overall unit; when the commander later would be killed in a horse riding accident, Washington would become the commanding officer. He "worked feverishly with John Carlyle to obtain sufficient supplies for the expedition... Dinwiddie had commissioned Carlyle on January 26, and the next day sent him an order to 'procure a sufficient Qu[anti]ty of Flower, Bread, Beef & Pork, for 500 Men for six or eight Months.' The post of commissary was potentially quite profitable – 'I am in hopes it may turn out 500 [pounds] per ann [um].,' Carlyle wrote – but it was also 'attended with great trouble & fatigue & care.' In fact, even with Carlyle's expert efforts, it proved so difficult to collect all that was needed that Washington finally decided to begin the march with sufficient supplies to get what was now a 120-man force only as far as Winchester..." Barely trained, inadequately supplied, and led by inexperienced officers, 120 men followed Lieutenant Colonel Washington out of Alexandria on April 2, 1754.

His force grew to 159 men at Winchester, and he headed northwest, still without adequate supplies. There was no road; and they had to clear a man-wide trail to accommodate wagons and artillery, felling trees, pulling stumps and even building bridges. At

best, they advanced four miles per day – frequently only two miles.

When he heard that Commissary La Force had been seen in the area, he assumed that La Force was reconnoitering for a general advance by the French; and Washington was intent upon capturing him. Later, when Indian allies reported seeing the footprints of Frenchmen a few miles away, Washington set off on a rainy, moonless night with forty men to look for them. Indian scouts located the sleeping Frenchmen; and Washington and his men and Indian allies surrounded them between seven and eight AM on May 28. When the battle began, the French were surprised and surrendered after brief firing. The Indians quickly killed and scalped the wounded French. Of the 33 French engaged in the battle, 21 survived unwounded and were taken prisoner, including Commissary La Force. One wounded man also survived the Indians. One Frenchman escaped and returned to Fort Duquesne to tell the tale. Among those killed was the French commander, Joseph Coulon, Sieur de Jumonville. The French claimed that Jumonville was an ambassador of the French crown. Washington apparently thought that ambassadors traveled openly and with few attendants. This skirmish, now called Jumonville Glen, is considered by most to be the opening battle of the French and Indian War (and the larger world war known as the Seven Years War).

Washington withdrew nearby to Great Meadows, a site he had called "a charming field for an encounter." He set his men to work digging entrenchments and building what he called a "Pallisado'd Fort" – unfortunately with a wooded area on high ground on three sides within firing range. He called it Fort Necessity.



*Fort Necessity, National Park Service*



On “June 10, he wrote to Dinwiddie that ‘We have been extremely ill used by Major Carlyle’s Deputys.’ ...John Carlyle was the expedition’s commissary and had six deputies under contract to supply provisions. For the acute shortages he was now experiencing, Washington blamed them rather than Carlyle himself because ‘he is a Gentleman.’ Washington wrote: ‘He, I believe has been decivd, and we have suffer’d by those under him.’ As of the tenth, the men (and women and children) at Great Meadows had been without flour for six days ‘and none upon the Road to our relief that we know of... We have not Provisions of any sort in the Camp to serve us 2 Days tho I have sent time after time acquainting therewith.’”

On June 9, 181 reinforcements arrived, but without provisions. On June 14, Captain James Mackay arrived with a company of British regulars and “5 Days allowance of flower, and 60 Beeves.”. Since Mackay was a regular army Captain, he technically outranked Washington, who was now a full Colonel, but a Colonel in the militia. This was a matter of great consternation to Washington. Washington had his men continue building roads, but the British regulars were above that type of labor. By June 23, all of the flour and bacon were gone. He put his men on a ration of parched corn and apportioned what little stringy beef was left. Soon the men were near starvation. Washington contemplated withdrawing, but he felt his men were too weak for the trip. (Perhaps a case could be made that John Carlyle’s poor management was a major cause of the defeat at Fort Necessity.) By July 2, his Indian allies, recognizing a losing situation, had melted away. By nightfall on July 2, Washington counted only 284 men fit for duty. Intelligence reports indicated that 1,600 French and 700 Indians were on the way; and the commander of the attacking force was Jumonville’s big brother.

On July 3, it began raining. Fort Necessity was on the low ground, and the defensive trenches began filling with water. The attack began shortly before noon. The French and Indians were firing from the woods down into the water-filled trenches. They also killed the horses and remaining cattle. With the pouring rain, the British powder became wet and many of their guns jammed. By dark, more than a third of Washington’s men were dead or dying. Washington sent his two French-speaking officer to negotiate terms of surrender. The French offered surprisingly lenient terms. Then, one of

Washington’s two French-speaking officers died unexpectedly, leaving only an officer Jacob van Braam, whose native language was Dutch, second language French, and third language English. In the dark and in the rain, van Braam interpreted the surrender document for Washington. Without realizing it, in signing the generous surrender document, he was admitting to “assassinating” (or murdering) Jumonville. The British were allowed to leave on foot (all of their horses had been killed); and they marched out of Fort Necessity on July 4, 1754.

When Washington reached Williamsburg on July 17, he was generally greeted as a hero. When Dinwiddie didn’t mount another expedition, Washington resigned his commission in disgust.

Dinwiddie appealed to the crown for a major offensive to evict the French once and for all. That set the stage for General Braddock’s arrival at Carlyle House in March 1755. George Washington would be an unpaid aide to General Braddock.



### **April 6, Sunday**

*Braddock Day*

12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

\$4 admission

### **April 19, Saturday**

*Garden Day*

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Free, House Tour \$4 admission.

### **April 23, Wednesday**

*Alexandria History Awards*

Alexandria Historical Society

The Lyceum, 7:30 p.m.

Free, public invited