

George Washington - "Son of the Republic, look and learn."



George Washington was an ordinary man who had been raised up by Providence and prepared by Providence to be the protector and defender of his country. He had a complete trust in God and God's divine plan for himself and for his country. For his trust in God and petitions in prayer "he was shown great favor by God. As Daniel of old was shown the destiny of the planet Earth, so was Washington shown the destiny of our country."¹ To help him in fulfillment of God's plan for America, Washington was given special divine graces. While Washington faced many challenges in life, they would help shape and groom him for the challenges that lay ahead. He had a destiny to fulfill, and for whatever God's reason, he had decided that this one is mine. Washington had his flaws and was not the most adept for the task for which he was chosen, but he had the wisdom and the will to meet God's needs.

From an early age Washington possessed the gift of an unshakable faith in God. He made God his refuge. He was said to have read the Bible every day "for an hour every morning and an hour every night, with prayer."² It

was this unwavering trust in God that gave him "moral courage" in times of despair, especially during the darkest times of the Revolutionary War. It was perhaps this moral courage that a later US general by the name of George Patton observed "was the most valuable and usually the most absent characteristic in men."³ Washington said, "if I know my own heart, my ambition would not lead me into public life; my only ambition is to do my duty in this world well as I am capable of performing it,"⁴ but public life was God's will. And in duty to God, he was willing to lay down his life for his country, if that was God's plan. His strong moral courage earned respect with friends and enemies alike. Even King George III, upon hearing that Washington planned to return to his farm after the war remarked, "If he indeed does that, he will be the greatest man in the world."⁵ His friend Henry Lee described Washington as, "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life ... the purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues."⁶ Despite all his shortcomings, as Chief Justice John Marshall noted, he was "the man on whom in times of danger every eye was turned, and all hopes were placed."⁷

Rarely discussed in most historical accounts of George Washington was his relationship with God. Like Joan of Arc from France in the Hundred Years War with England, Washington was given the divine grace of protection by God to help him to accomplish his mission. He had come to suspect he had divine protection from an early age. Any uncertainties he may have had were settled after the battle [massacre] of Monongahela on July 9, 1755. He wrote to his brother, "By all powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot from under me, yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side of me."⁸ This was not just one isolated incident. History has recorded countless other accounts of George Washington in harm's way and yet he remained unscathed. He would remain "bulletproof" through the French Indian War, multiple assassination attempts, and throughout all of the battles of the Revolutionary War.

Washington had a destiny to fulfill, which was to help bring a new Republic, based on biblical law, “One Nation Under God,” into existence. All was part of God’s divine plan to create a Republic for His children (its citizens) to honor Him in prayer and through their good deeds, “His land and the Union.”⁹ And divine plans are never deterred by the hand of man. Washington, through sheer strength of character, was able to shepherd the country through its military struggles with Britain. His personal moral character was so well respected that his presence and guidance in presiding over the Constitutional Convention [Miracle at Philadelphia] and serving the country as her first president provided the needed stability at a volatile time in American history; especially when many were concerned about kingship. It was fortunate for the United States and the world that God rose up and protected such a man. For if Washington had not remained “bulletproof” under God’s protection and guidance, the history of the world today would be very different indeed. It is almost unfathomable to consider, but there really was no one else in the colonies at the time, other than George Washington, who could have shepherded the fragile young Republic into existence as he did.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.

— Psalm 91:2-10 RSV

George Washington’s family lineage in America started back about seventy-five years before his birth with his great-grandfather, John Washington. It was John’s accidental immigration or swim to America for safety, which started the family lineage in America. In order for Washington to have his strong, tall, imposing, physical build, towering over most of his peers, a good genetic lineage was required. For Washington’s family to be in Virginia and so politically well-connected to the House of Burgesses, and later Fairfax family, extremely good luck or, more likely the hand of Providence was involved. And for Washington to have amassed such a large land inheritance and financial base over three generations, which gave him financial freedom, was most likely not by accident. It was planned. His financial good fortune would be put to good use toward the cause of God and country. If Washington not been born into a family of privilege, he would not have had the financial means to attend the Continental Congress, serve as Commander-in-Chief for free, pay his personal expenses during the Revolutionary War (reimbursed after the war), pay some soldiers out of his own pocket, and assist in launching six schooners of the Massachusetts Navy during the war.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you.

— Jeremiah 1:5 RSV

John Washington (George Washington’s great-grandfather) was the son of an English clergyman, short on cash; he was hired on to a merchant ship bound for the Virginia Colony. Loaded with tobacco for the return voyage, the ship was caught in a sudden storm off the Virginia coast and sank in 1657. By good fortune or divine plan, “The ship sank near The Cliffs, a plantation owned by Nathaniel Pope. Pope befriended the young Washington and, fortunately for John, had a marriageable daughter named Anne. John and Anne were married in 1658 and received a wedding gift of 700 acres on Mattox Creek from her father. John and Anne had five children together, two who died in childhood and whose names are unknown. After Anne's death in 1668/9,

John married twice more before his death in 1677.¹⁰ It was perhaps by good fortune that John chose to stay on in America as his father “was a Royalist who quickly fell out of favor when Oliver Cromwell’s Parliament overthrew the king in 1656.”¹¹ “During his lifetime, he was active in local politics and served for a time in the Virginia House of Burgesses. He actively acquired land and, by the time of his death, owned more than 8,500 acres.”¹²

John Washington’s oldest son was Lawrence Washington (the first Lawrence) was the firstborn male child and would, by tradition, inherit the majority of the estate. He was sent to England where he received a formal education. “He married Mildred Warner (whose father had been speaker of Virginia’s House of Burgesses), eventually becoming sheriff, justice, and Burgess. He died at age 38, leaving his estate to Mildred and his three children. John, his eldest, received the home tract and other lands; his second born, Augustine (George Washington’s future father) received about 1100 acres. Little sister Mildred, then an infant, received about 2500 acres.”¹³

Augustine Washington (George Washington’s future father) was four years old at the time of his father’s death. His mother Mildred, widowed with three children, soon married George Gale. He “returned to his home in Whitehaven, Cumberland, England with his new wife and stepchildren. George [Gale] intended to keep the children in England, and it seemed certain that Augustine Washington would not return to America in his formative years, if ever. George Gale sought proper schooling for his step children and enrolled them in the prestigious Appleby School in Westmoreland, England. Life in England seemed very promising for young Augustine Washington when he was faced with a second tragedy. His mother Mildred died in 1701, only three years after his father Lawrence's death. Augustine, at age 8, had already endured the loss of both parents.”¹⁴

By odd twist of fate, Augustine Washington (George Washington’s future father) would return to rural Virginia in 1706. His father “Lawrence Washington provided that upon the death of he and his wife, his estate should revert to and be managed by his first cousin John Washington of Chotank, King George County [then Stafford County] Virginia. Upon learning of the death of his cousin's wife, John dispatched George Gale and the Courts of Stafford County, petitioning for the legal adoption of young Augustine and his older brother and younger sister under the terms of Lawrence Washington's will. The courts found in favor of John, and George Gale relinquished custody of Augustine.”¹⁵

Augustine Washington (George Washington’s father) married Jane Butler in 1715. Together they had four children, of which only two, Lawrence and Augustine Jr. would live to adulthood. Augustine’s first wife Jane died in 1729. Described as a “blond six-footer, Augustine was noted for his great physical strength and kindly disposition.”¹⁶ He remarried Mary Ball, “known to be an extremely self-willed woman”¹⁷ in 1731. They had six children, with George Washington being the firstborn in 1732, his sister Betty in 1733, followed by Samuel in 1734, John Augustine in 1736, Charles in 1737 and Mildred in 1739. Mildred would not live to adulthood. One area which Mary Ball Washington was “strong willed” was in the area of religion and religious education. She took a personal hand in teaching and instilling a set of strong moral and religious teachings in her children.

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. He was born into Christian family at time in when the country was experiencing a massive spiritual reawakening in God, known as the First Great Awakening (1730-1770). “His father spent much time and took great pains to teach George to be unselfish, to inspire him with love and truth, and to teach him to know and worship God.”¹⁸ After his fathers death, “his religious instruction was turned over to his mother. ...She taught George the Bible. She taught him to pray. She taught him from the prayer book of the Anglican Church, of which they were faithful members.”¹⁹ Perhaps it was her extremely strong willed personality, but his mother Mary would have the most influence on George’s spiritual and religious formation which would become the basis of his moral character. “She also taught him from various devout and Godly books such as the famous book entitled *Contemplations*:

Moral and Divine, by Sir Matthew Hale, a leading jurist in England. Washington kept that book all of his life. The volume, copiously underlined, was found in the library at Mount Vernon after his death.”²⁰ Also found in his library at Mount Vernon was a small book, “24 pages of prayers that were carefully written in Washington’s own hand when he was about 20 years of age.”²¹

Washington’s closest and most influential siblings were his half-brother Lawrence and John Augustine, nicknamed “Jack.” Most of his education was self-taught with the activities of the plantation and from family members. George was likely looking forward to a formal education in England, like his half-brother Lawrence. Providence, it seems may, have had other plans. Any hopes for a formal education in England were quickly dashed when his father Augustine died in 1743. At the formative age of eleven, he went to live with his half-brother Lawrence, a respected captain in the British Army. Lawrence had married Ann Fairfax, daughter of one of the most politically influential families and largest land owner in Virginia. It would be those family connections that would start him in a job surveying and later military adventures. Lord Fairfax’s daughter, Sally Fairfax would also be his first love. While George later took note of the workings of the hand of Providence in his life, this one single event, would cast his lot and set his course as a future military leader. The sudden death of his father and move to his half-brother Lawrence’s plantation at Mount Vernon would prove to be fortuitous for George’s future political, financial and military career as well as for the future Republic.

George Washington’s limited education, cut short by his father’s death, would be unsettling for him at times throughout his entire life. It would prove an embarrassment on occasion, especially in such prominent social circles. To make up for his educational deficiencies, he did learn from what was available. For an early handwriting exercise, he copied *The Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, which he would commit to memory. While his moral religious beliefs instilled by his mother formed the foundation of the man, *The Rules of Civility* became the basis for much of his social interaction. Years later, many a foreign dignitary would be impressed with Washington as a gentleman and with his social graces, considering his lack of formal training, education and backwoods upbringing. Others, like John Adams who knew him better and, perhaps jealous of his reputation, would say that he was “too illiterate, too unlearned, too unread for his station and reputation.”²²

Washington’s loss of a formal education and his feeling of inadequacy would prove to be one of his greatest strengths. It added to his quiet humility, which was one of his most admired personal traits. It would be his quiet humility and his self-sacrifice that years later would help to hold a nation together around his moral courage. Below are some excerpts from 110 rules from his schoolbook, *The Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*.

Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present; In the presence of others, sing not to yourself with a humming voice, or drum with your fingers or feet; If you cough, sneeze, sigh or yawn, do it not loud but privately, and speak not in your yawning, but put your handkerchief or hand before your face and turn aside; Kill no vermin, or fleas, lice, ticks, etc. in the sight of others; If you see any filth or thick spittle put your foot dexterously upon it; if it be upon the clothes of your companions, put it off privately, and if it be upon your own clothes, return thanks to him who puts it off; In putting off your hat to persons of distinction, as noblemen, justices, churchmen, etc., make a reverence, bowing more or less according to the custom of the better bred, and quality of the persons. Among your equals expect not always that they should begin with you first, but to pull off the hat when there is no need is affectation. In the manner of saluting and resaluting in words, keep to the most usual custom; Let your discourse with men of business be short and comprehensive; Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company; Let your conversation be without malice or envy, for 'tis a sign of a tractable and commendable nature, and in all causes of passion permit reason to govern; Never

express anything unbecoming, nor act against the rules moral before your inferiors; Utter not base and frivolous things among grave and learned men, nor very difficult questions or subjects among the ignorant, or things hard to be believed; stuff not your discourse with sentences among your betters nor equals; Undertake not what you cannot perform but be careful to keep your promise; In company of those of higher quality than yourself, speak not 'til you are asked a question, then stand upright, put off your hat and answer in few words; Speak not evil of the absent, for it is unjust; Cleanse not your teeth with the tablecloth, napkin, fork or knife, but if others do it, let it be done with a pick tooth; Be not angry at table whatever happens and if you have reason to be so, show it not but on a cheerful countenance especially if there be strangers, for good humor makes one dish of meat a feast; If others talk at table be attentive, but talk not with meat in your mouth; When you speak of God or His attributes, let it be seriously and with reverence. Honor and obey your natural parents although they be poor; Let your recreations be manful not sinful; Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.²³

By the age of fourteen, George Washington was young, restless and looking for adventure. He was perhaps trying to emulate his half-brother Lawrence when he attempted to join the British Navy. Such youthful plans however, were not to be. He had bags packed and he was ready to go when his mother put a stop to his Navy enlistment. His interest and ambitions soon turned to surveying. "Fortunately, George inherited his father's surveying instruments ... He quickly learned the elements of surveying in 1746-47 and began to run lines at



Ferry Farm."²⁴ Lord Fairfax had recently arrived in the colonies to oversee a family land grant from King Charles II. He "had inherited a large grant of land containing over 5,272,000 acres which was in an area lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers and extending west to the origins of both rivers."²⁵ He planned to have the land surveyed and sell-farm, size lots. The following year, at the age of sixteen, Washington accompanied George William Fairfax and surveyor James Genn over the Blue Ridge Mountains to survey the fertile lands of the Shenandoah Valley. By the age of seventeen, he was surveyor of Culpepper Country. He did surveying work for Lord Fairfax and for the Ohio Company in the Allegheny Mountains. He made his first land purchase in 1750 at the age of eighteen.

By odd twist of fate or divine hand, George Washington would inherit Mount Vernon. His half-brother Lawrence had contracted tuberculosis a few years earlier and was dying. Hoping to relieve his symptoms and possibly cure the disease, Washington accompanied Lawrence to Barbados in September of 1751. Lawrence finally succumbed to the disease, and died early in 1752. Washington suffered heavily from his trip to Barbados. Not only did he have to deal with the loss of his closest brother and military role model, he contracted smallpox and became very sick. He survived the disease, but it took over two years for him to fully recover, which left his face scarred for life. His exposure to smallpox did help him later in life, especially during the American Revolutionary War. While many succumbed to the smallpox epidemic and died during the war, he was immune. One other advantage of his trip to Barbados was that he had a chance to personally inspect the British military installations and talk with many of the officers.

"When Lawrence died the estate passed to his infant heir, Sarah, the one surviving child of four that had been born to Lawrence and his wife, Ann Fairfax. Under Lawrence's will, Ann received a life interest in Mount Vernon and the use of one-half of the property's slaves; the rest of his estate was left to Sarah. The will stipulated further that if Sarah died before her mother Mount Vernon would pass to George Washington. If Sarah died childless, part of the estate would descend to her mother and part would be divided between Augustine and George Washington. As it turned out, Sarah died in 1754 at age 4....Ann remarried to George

Lee (1714-61).²⁶ George Washington, as executor of his brother's estate, worked out an agreement to rent from Ann in 1754. He took ownership of Mount Vernon after Ann Fairfax's death in 1761.

Upon his return from Barbados, George Washington took over plantation operations at Mount Vernon. He also decided to follow in Lawrence's footsteps. With no military experience, he lobbied Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia for a position with the Virginia militia. He was appointed a major shortly before the first shots were fired in the French and Indian War. Like clockwork, in less than a year he would be deeply involved in the conflict. It would also prove to be valuable military experience for the later Revolutionary War.

"In 1753, the French began the construction of a fort in the Ohio country near Lake Erie. Within a few months, Governor Dinwiddie learned that the French had a force of some 800 men and were in the process of building another fort to the south on the Allegheny River in British-claimed territory."²⁷ Washington volunteered for the dangerous mission of leading an expedition to the Ohio River to challenge the French claims to the Allegheny River Valley. It was a 500 mile journey over uncharted land, through ice and snow, during the coldest months of the year, with a message for the French military officials they did not want to hear. As a special envoy to Governor Dinwiddie, "Washington set out from Williamsburg [October 31, 1753] with orders to deliver a message to the French commander complaining of their encroachments into British territory. In addition, he was to seek assistance from Indian leaders of the Six Nations, to collect information on the construction of French forts, and to provide intelligence on the numbers of French troops in the area. Major Washington delivered the governor's letter to the French commander at Fort Le Boeuf, who asserted France's claim to the valley and refused to withdraw."²⁸

When Washington heard about the French plans to take possession of the Ohio and of their troop strength, he headed back immediately to warn Governor Dinwiddie. He headed back on foot with a trapper named Mr. Gist. They split off from the small group and supplies to make better time. He was extremely fortunate to have made it back alive. They had to deal with ice-clogged rivers, deep snow, frigid temperatures, an assassination attempt and roving bands of warriors in the woods. At one point, he wrote in his journal, "We fell in with a Party of French Indians, who had lain in wait for us; one of them fired at ... me, not 15 Steps, but fortunately missed."²⁹ "Gist wished to kill him. Washington could not bear to see a man killed. So the brave was set off in one direction, while Grist and Washington ran in another. For a long time they dared not light a campfire. Moving sometimes separately, sometimes together, ever wary of an Indian attack."³⁰ He arrived back to Williamsburg on January 16, 1754.



Washington kept a journal of his adventures which was published in the Maryland Gazette in March and London in June of 1754 under the name, *The journal of Major George Washington*. It earned him a great deal of notoriety in America and in Britain as well. The following is a brief excerpt from George Washington's journal:

There was no way for getting over but on a raft, which we set about, with but one poor hatchet, and got finished just after sun setting, after a whole day's work; we got it launched, and on board of it, and set off; but before we were half way over, we were jammed in the ice in such a manner that we expected every moment our raft to sink, and ourselves to perish: I put out my

setting pole to try to stop the raft, that the ice might pass by, when the rapidity of the stream threw it with so much violence against the pole, that it jerked me out into 10 feet water, but I fortunately saved myself by catching hold of one of the raft logs; notwithstanding all our efforts we could not get the raft to either shore, but were obliged, as we were near an island, to quit our raft and make to it. The cold was so extremely severe, that Mr. Gist had all his fingers, and some of his toes frozen, and the water was shut up so hard, that we found no difficulty in getting off the island on the ice in the morning.³¹

Soaked to the bone by the ice-cold water, when Washington climbed back aboard the raft, Mr. Gist said to him, "It is a miracle that you were not drowned."³² Washington responded that he was "cool enough for now" and that he would "not despair so long as I remember that one faithful saint (his mother) is praying for me."³³ Before his trip, his mother's parting words to him were "remember that God is our sure trust, To Him I commend you." "My son, neglect not the duty of secret prayer."³⁴ It was a miracle that Washington did not drown in the icy waters and it was also miracle that he survived the assassination attempt by the Indian warrior at almost point blank-range.

On April of 1754, Washington was promoted to lieutenant colonel under Colonel Joshua Fry. They led a group of 150 men toward Ohio when Colonel Fry's sudden death from injuries received from a fall from his horse unexpectedly (or perhaps Providence's plan) left Washington in command. They intercepted and surrounded a small party of French and Indian troops, where a gun battle ensued. He wrote of the battle in a letter to his brother John Augustine Washington:

3 days ago we had an engagement with the French. I had scarcely 40 men under my command, and about 10, or a doz. indians, nevertheless we obtained a most signal victory. The battle lasted about 10 to 15 minutes, sharp firing on both sides, when the French gave ground & ran, but no great purpose; there were 12 killed.....Among them was Mon. de Jumonville ... I fortunately escaped without a wound, tho' the right Wing where I stood was exposed & received all the enemy's fore and was the part where the man was killed & the rest wounded. I can with truth assure you, I heard bullets whistle and believe me there was something charming about the sound.³⁵

The party Washington and his troops apparently ambushed was a French diplomatic mission sent to meet the British. They had killed the French ambassador and nine others who were getting dressed and having their breakfast. The battles net effect was to escalate tensions between the British and French, both in America as well as in Europe.

"Forest intelligence reported that the French, who were erecting a strong point [Fort Duquesne] at the Forks, had enough manpower left to send eight hundred soldiers and four hundred Indians to annihilate Washington's little army."³⁶ In response, Washington and his men constructed a small stockade fort at the edge of a clearing named Fort Necessity. It was an indefensible fort, hastily constructed in a bad location. Washington knew a French attack was imminent. He wrote Governor Dinwiddie on May 29, 1754, "For my own part I can answer, I have a constitution hardy enough to encounter and undergo the most severe trials, and, I flatter myself, resolution to face what any man durst, as shall be proved when it comes to the test, which I believe we are on the borders of."³⁷

"As on former occasions, Washington was his own chaplain. Twice a day, his little army were called to prayers in the fort, which he himself conducted. On the Sabbath, only work of necessity were performed; and he conducted religious services. Sometimes his brief remarks, called forth by the conditions of his army, deeply impressed his listeners, who knew that they were honest words from a true heart."³⁸ Washington did not want the actions and spoken words of his men to offend God. "He was exceedingly annoyed by the profanity and

wickedness of his men.”³⁹ He issued the following harsh order:

Colonel Washington has observed that the men of his regiment are very profane and reprobate. He takes this opportunity to inform them of his great displeasure at such practices; and assures them that, if they do not leave them off, they shall be severely punished. The officers are desired, if they hear any man swear for make use of an oath or execration, to order the offender twenty-five lashes immediately, without a court-martial. For a second offence he shall be more severely punished.⁴⁰

The battle started about midday on July 3rd under heavy rain with the French and Indians shooting from the hill down into the fort. “We continued this unequal fightwith an enemy sheltered behind the trees, ourselves without shelter, in trenches full of water, in a settled rain, and the enemy galling us on all sides incessantly from the woods, till 8 o’clock at night when the French called for parley.”⁴¹ Providence may have assisted Washington and his troops in an unexpected way with the driving rains. The rain helped to quell the flames in the fort. The rain also soaked the powder stores and left his men-knee deep in water in the trenches. The heavy rains and “ceasefire enabled Washington to assess more clearly his hopeless situation. A third of his force—more than a hundred men—were dead or wounded. There was hardly any food or usable powder.”⁴² In a surprise move the French offered a surrender agreement which Washington refused to sign until amended. It may have been bad a translation, but he signed an agreement to exchange the French prisoners, stay out of said territory for one year, and admitted to the “assassination of their diplomat, Jumonville.”⁴³ Some of Washington’s men were held captive to ensure the safe return of the French prisoners. On July 4th, 1754, Washington and his men by foot were sent home packing. The French destroyed and burned the remainder of the fort.

What Washington did not know at the time was that the French commander Capt. Louis Coulon de Villiers was looking to avenge the death of his brother Jumonville who was a member of the ambushed French diplomatic mission. The French and Indians had Washington and his troops pinned down and outnumbered. Given another day they could have most likely won the battle. “How different world history might have turned out had the French decided to do away with this green soldier when they had cause and opportunity! Instead, twenty-two years later, the French would again come to the aid of George Washington in his war of revolution against England.”⁴⁴ Soon after his return, the King reduced rank on the provincial officers, giving preference to the British officers. Washington, as well as many other officers, promptly retired.

The French were now grasping an even tighter hand on American territory. “Governor Dinwiddie was never in such trouble before. Fort Duquesne haunted him in his sleep.”⁴⁵ The Albany Agreement worked out by Benjamin Franklin with different colonies and the Iroquois failed to provide the common defense needed. “In January of 1775, General Braddock was sent from Ireland, with two regiments of infantry, well equipped and well drilled. Their arrival aroused the depressed colonists to enthusiasm.”⁴⁶ Being an astute general, Braddock quickly realized that one major component missing was Washington and his fellow officers. Braddock did not have the knowledge of the backwoods territory or the ability to handle the undisciplined American troops. For Washington, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that had been prepared for him. He followed his inner spirit which moved him to attain more knowledge of the military profession. He wrote to a friend,



I must be ingenuous enough to confess that I am not a little biased by selfish considerations. To explain-I wish earnestly to attain some knowledge in the military profession, and, believing a more

favorable opportunity cannot offer, than to serve under an officer of General Braddock's abilities and experience, it does, you may reasonably suppose, not a little contribute to influence my choice.⁴⁷

"As soon as Washington's mother learned that her son had decided to join Braddock's army, she hastened to Mount Vernon in great distress. "I hoped you had quit war forever, George," she said, "and would be content to look after your farm and mother, without exposing yourself to death anymore."⁴⁸ After a lengthy discussion on patriotism, character and loss of honor if his army commitment were broken, she reluctantly granted her approval. As she said to him in the earlier battles of the French and Indian War, "May the Lord go with you and preserve you and the country,"⁴⁹ "My prayers are all that I can give my country, and these it shall have. That God may protect you through all the dangers and hardships of war and return you in safety, will be my constant prayer. With His blessing, you can be a useful man in war, as in peace, and, without it, you can expect nothing."⁵⁰

Washington accepted the position of colonel under Major General Edward Braddock and headed back once again toward Ohio to retake British territory. He came down with a fever and became so ill that he had to ride in a covered wagon in the back of the convoy. He had a lingering concern of a surprise Indian attack which he expressed on more than one occasion to General Braddock. Washington's request for forward scouts to look for Indians laying in ambush was turned down. General Braddock was too proud of his well disciplined British soldiers that his pride stood in the way of any advice from a young Colonial officer. The army crossed the Monongahela River and headed over land toward Fort Duquesne.

After suffering from dysentery and barely able to mount a horse, Washington rode with a pillow under his saddle and moved to the front of the line. It was about three or four o'clock in the afternoon of July 9th when they headed through a low spot between two hills. Suddenly, gun shots rang out from behind trees, under brush and through dense foliage. From the hillside, bullets poured down upon the troops from an unseen enemy. The troops started dropping to the ground one after another in utter confusion. With bullets raining down on the troops from many directions, in the smoke of the gunfire, against a backdrop of loud bloodcurdling Indian war cries, panic soon ensued.

Washington, "without the least regard to personal safety, he galloped over the field, tall noble form presenting a rare target for the Indian sharpshooters, who took special pains to bring him down. Two horses were shot under him, and four balls pierced his clothes; still he was conspicuous everywhere that he could be of service; and, for three hours distributed his commander's orders, with deadly missiles flying around him like hailstones."⁵¹ He later wrote to his mother, "I was the only person then left to distribute the General's orders, which I was scarcely able to do, as I was not half recovered from a violent illness, that had confined me to my bed and a wagon for above ten days."⁵² How he was able to muster the strength still suffering from his sickness and nausea we will never know. A bullet struck his gold watch, severing it from its chain; another bullet removed the hat from his head. A medical doctor who survived the event recounted, "I expected to see him fall every moment. He dashed over the field, reckless of death, when bullets whistled about him on every side. Why he was not killed I cannot divine, unless the watchful Providence was preserving him for more important work."⁵³

"A famous Indian warrior, who acted a leading part in that bloody tragedy, was often heard to swear, that 'Washington was never born to be killed by a bullet! ...For I had seventeen fair fires at him with my rifle, and after all should not bring him to the ground!' And indeed whoever considers that a good rifle levelled by a proper marksman, hardly ever misses his aim, will readily enough conclude with this unlettered savage, that there was some invisible hand turning aside the bullets."⁵⁵

General Braddock who was gravely wounded, put Washington in charge of the retreat. Washington maintained order, pulled up their rear guard and helped to extricate the troops from the ambush. It was the

brave undisciplined Virginians who saved many of the remaining British troops from complete destruction. Of the approximately 1,500 men, almost 1000 were killed or wounded, with the officers faring far worse with sixty-three out of the eighty-five. A few remaining men stumbled in to camp. A prisoner at Fort Duquesne, Colonel James Smith's eyewitness testimony:

I was then in high hopes that I would soon see them fly before the British troops, and that General Braddock would take the fort and rescue me. . . . They brought the news that Braddock was defeated. After that, another company came in. which appeared to be about one hundred, and chiefly Indians, and it seemed to me that almost every one of this company was carrying scalps; after this came another company with a number of wagon horses, and also a great many scalps. Those that were coming in, and those that had arrived, kept a constant firing of small arms, and also the great guns in the fort, which were accompanied with the most hideous shouts and yells from all quarters; so that it appeared to me as if the infernal regions had broken loose.

About sundown I beheld a small party coming in with about a dozen prisoners, stripped naked, with their hands tied behind their backs, with their faces and part of their bodies blackened. These prisoners they burned to death on the bank of Allegheny river opposite to the fort. I stood on the fort wall until I beheld them begin to burn one of these men; they had him tied to a stake, and kept touching him with fire brands, red-hot irons, &c., and he screamed in a most doleful manner,—the Indians in the meantime yelling like infernal spirits. As this scene appeared too shocking for me to behold, I retired to my lodgings both sore and sorry. . . . A few days after this the Indians demanded me, and I was obliged to go with them.⁵⁵

Washington described in his military report that “In all, that night the Indians burned 12 of 30 prisoners with their bloodlust satiated the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley”⁵⁶ with the Indians “yelling like infernal spirits” under the watchful eye of the French. Such was not the ethical way Washington believed in treating prisoners of war. In an emotion-filled speech, Washington conducted the funeral services the next day.

Soon after his return, he wrote a letter to his brother John Augustine Washington about the battle. “As I have heard since my arriv’l at this place, a circumstantial acct. of my death and dying Speech, I take this early opportunity contradicting both, and of assuring you that I now exist and appear in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectations; I had 4 Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me, and yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side of me!”⁵⁷

The Battle of Monongahela would go down in history as Britain's worst defeat in the French and Indian war. While Washington was glad to be alive, as he wrote to Governor Robert Dinwiddie, “I feel lucky escaped without a wound, tho I had four Bullets through my Coat and two Horses shot under me. It is supposed that we left 300 or more dead in the Field....I was not half recovered from a violent illness that confined me to my Bed, and a Wagon, for above ten Days.”⁵⁸ Soon after the battle, however, his feelings of relief quickly turned to anger, as the unsettling news came in that the French and Indian force had only lost about fifteen men with another twelve men wounded. Washington wrote, “We have been beaten, shamefully beaten—shamefully beaten by a handful of men, who only intended to molest and disturb our march! Victory was their smallest expectation! But see the wondrous works of Providence, the uncertainty of human things! We, but a few moments before, believed our numbers almost equal to the force of Canada; they only expected to annoy us. Yet, contrary to all expectation and human probability, and even to the common course of things, we were totally defeated, and have sustained the loss of everything.”⁵⁹

The dark clouds that hung over the Colonies from the massacre at Monongahela would turn out to have

a golden lining for George Washington. General Braddock had put him in charge during the battle; he was one of the few military leaders left alive. His bravery during battle and coolness under fire erased any tarnish to his reputation from the death of the French diplomat and surrender the previous year. Washington's reputation soon spread throughout the colonies, Benjamin Franklin and others praised him for his courage. A well known Presbyterian minister by the name of Reverend Samuel Davies prophetically stated, "As a remarkable instance of this, I may point out to the public that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so single a manner for some important service to his country."⁶⁰

To be added shortly

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