

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE FRONT!

The French chief in his note to Gov-er-nor Din-wid-die had said, in words that were smooth but clear, that he would not leave the banks of the O-hi-o; so the Eng-lish felt as if it were time for them to make a move, though they did not wish to bring on a war.

Land was set off on the O-hi-o where a fort was built, and the rest of it left for the use of the troops.

Wash-ing-ton was asked to lead the troops, but he shrank from it as a charge too great for one so young. So Josh-u-a Fry was made Col-o-nel, and Wash-ing-ton Lieu-ten-ant Col-o-nel of a force of 300 men.

It was hard work to get men to join the ranks. The pay was small, and those who had good farms and good homes did not care to leave them. Those who had a mind to go were for the most part men who did not like to work, and had no house or home they could call their own.

Some were bare-foot, some had no shirts to their backs, and not a few were with-out coat or waist-coat, as the vest was called in those days.

If it was hard work to get this kind of men, it was still more of a

task to find those who would serve as chiefs, and Wash-ing-ton found him-self left in charge of a lot of raw troops who knew no will but their own.

But Van-Bra-am, who had taught Wash-ing-ton how to use the sword, was with him, and gave him just the aid he had need of at this time.

On A-pril 2, 1754, Wash-ing-ton, at the head of 150 men, set off for the new fort at the Fork of the O-hi-o. The roads were rough, and the march was slow, and it was not till A-pril 20 that they reached Will's Creek. Here they were met by a small force, in charge of Cap-tain Ad-am Ste-phen. The rest of the force, with the field-guns, were to come by way of the Po-to-mac. These last were in charge of Col-o-nel Fry.

When Wash-ing-ton reached Will's Creek word was brought him that a large force of French troops had borne down on the new fort. Cap-tain Trent, who was in charge of the few troops in the fort, was a-way at the time, and the young En-sign Ward did not know what to do. He sought the aid of Half-King, who told him to plead with the French, and to beg them to wait till the Cap-tain came back, and the two went at once to the French camp. But the French would not wait, or make terms of peace. They had come as foes, and told En-sign Ward that if he did not leave the fort at once, with all his men, they would put him out by force. All the French would grant was that our men might take their tools with them; so the next morn they filed out of the fort, gave up their arms, and took the path to the woods. The French

took the fort and built it up, and called it Fort Du-quesne (kane), which was the name of the Gov-er-nor of Can-a-da.

When the sad news was brought to Wash-ing-ton he was at a loss to know what to do, or which way to turn. Here he was with a small band of raw troops right in the midst of foes, red and white, who would soon hem them in and use them ill if they found out where they were. Yet it would not do to turn back, or show signs of fear. Col-o-nel Fry had not yet come up and the weight of care was thrown on Wash-ing-ton.

He let the Gov-er-nors of Penn-syl-va-ni-a and Ma-ry-land know of his plight, and urged them to send on troops. But none came to his aid.

He had a talk with his chief men, and they all thought it would be best to push on through the wild lands, make the road as they went on, and try to reach the mouth of Red-stone Creek, where they would build a fort. By this means the men would be kept at work, their fears would be quelled, and a way made for the smooth and swift march of the troops in the rear.

There was so much to be done that the men, work as hard as they might, could not clear the way with much speed. There were great trees to be cut down, rocks to be moved, swamps to be filled up, and streams to be bridged. While in the midst of these toils, the bread gave out, and the lack of food made the men too weak to work. In spite of all these ills they made out to move at the rate of four miles a day, up steep hills, and through dense woods that have since borne the name of "The

Shades of Death."

While at a large stream where they had to stop to build a bridge, Wash-ing-ton was told that it was not worth while for him to try to go by land to Red-stone Creek, when he could go by boat in much less time.

This would be a good plan, if it would work; and to make sure, Wash-ing-ton took five men with him in a bark boat down the stream. One of these men was a red-skin guide. When they had gone ten miles, the guide said that that was as far as he would go. Wash-ing-ton said, "Why do you want to leave us now? We need you, and you know that we can not get on with-out you. Tell us why you wish to leave."

The red-man said, "Me want gifts. The red-men will not work with-out them. The French know this, and are wise. If you want the red-men to be your guides, you must buy them. They do not love you so well that they will serve you with-out pay."

Wash-ing-ton told the guide that when they got back he would give him a fine white shirt with a frill on it, and a good great-coat, and this put an end to the "strike" for that time. They kept on in the small boat for a score of miles, till they came to a place where there was a falls in the stream at least 40 feet. This put a stop to their course, and Wash-ing-ton went back to camp with his mind made up to go on by land.

He was on his way to join his troops when word was brought him from Half-King to be on his guard, as the French were close at hand. They had been on the march for two days, and meant to strike the first foe they should see.

Half-King said that he and the rest of his chiefs would be with Wash-ing-ton in five days to have a talk.

Wash-ing-ton set to work at once to get his troops in shape to meet the foe. Scouts were sent out. There was a scare in the night. The troops sprang to arms, and kept on the march till day-break. In the mean-time, at nine o'clock at night, word came from Half-King, who was then six miles from the camp, that he had seen the tracks of two French-men, and the whole force was near that place.

Wash-ing-ton put him-self at the head of two score men, left the rest to guard the camp, and set off to join Half-King. The men had to grope their way by foot-paths through the woods. The night was dark and there had been quite a fall of rain, so that they slipped and fell, and lost their way, and had to climb the great rocks, and the trees that had been blown down and blocked their way.

It was near sun-rise when they came to the camp of Half-King, who at once set out with a few of his braves to show Wash-ing-ton the tracks he had seen. Then Half-King called up two of his braves, showed them the tracks, and told them what to do. They took the scent, and went off like hounds, and brought back word that they had traced the

foot-prints to a place shut in by rocks and trees where the French were in camp.

It was planned to take them off their guard. Wash-ing-ton was to move on the right, Half-King and his men on the left. They made not a sound. Wash-ing-ton was the first on the ground, and as he came out from the rocks and trees at the head of his men, the French caught sight of him and ran to their arms.

A sharp fire was kept up on both sides. De Ju-mon-ville, who led the French troops, was killed, with ten of his men. One of Wash-ing-ton's men was killed, and two or three met with wounds. None of the red-men were hurt, as the French did not aim their guns at them at all. In less than half an hour the French gave way, and ran, but Wash-ing-ton's men soon came up with them, took them, and they were sent, in charge of a strong guard, to Gov-er-nor Din-wid-die.

This was the first act of war, in which blood had been shed, and Wash-ing-ton had to bear a great deal of blame from both France and Eng-land till the truth was made known. He was thought to have been too rash, and too bold, and in more haste to make war than to seek for peace. These sins were charged to his youth, for it was not known then how much more calm, and wise, and shrewd he was than most men who were twice his age.

The French claimed that this band had been sent out to ask Wash-ing-ton, in a kind way, to leave the lands that were held by the

crown of France. But Wash-ing-ton was sure they were spies; and Half-King said they had bad hearts, and if our men were such fools as to let them go, he would give them no more aid.

Half-King was full of fight, and Wash-ing-ton was flushed with pride, and in haste to move on and brave the worst. He wrote home: "The Min-goes have struck the French, and I hope will give a good blow be-fore they have done."

Then he told of the fight he had been in, and how he had won it, and was not hurt though he stood in the midst of the fierce fire. The balls whizzed by him, "and," said Wash-ing-ton "I was charmed with the sound."

This boast came to the ears of George II. who said, in a dry sort of a way, "He would not say so if he had heard ma-ny."

When long years had passed, some one asked Wash-ing-ton if he had made such a speech. "If I did," said he, "it was when I was young." And he was but 22 years of age.

He knew that as soon as the French heard of the fight and their bad luck, they would send a strong force out to meet him, so he set all his men to work to add to the size of the earth-work, and to fence it in so that it might be more of a strong-hold. Then he gave to it the name of Fort Ne-ces-si-ty, for it had been thrown up in great haste in time of great need, when food was so scant it was feared the troops

would starve to death. At one time, for six days they had no flour, and, of course, no bread.

News came of the death of Col-o-nel Fry, at Will's creek, and Wash-ing-ton was forced to take charge of the whole force. Fry's troops--300 in all--came up from Will's Creek, and Half-King brought 40 red-men with their wives and young ones and these all had to be fed and cared for.

Young as he was Wash-ing-ton was like a fa-ther to this strange group of men. On Sundays, when in camp, he read to them from the word of God, and by all his acts made them feel that he was a good and true man, and fit to be their chief.

The red-men did quite well as spies and scouts, but were not of much use in the field, and they, and some men from South Car-o-li-na, did much to vex young Wash-ing-ton.

Half-King did not like the way that white men fought, so he took him-self and his band off to a safe place. The white men from South Car-o-li-na, who had come out to serve their king, were too proud to soil their hands or to do hard work, nor would they be led by a man of the rank of Col-o-nel.

In the midst of all these straits Wash-ing-ton stood calm and firm.

The South Car-o-li-na troops were left to guard the fort, while the

rest of the men set out to clear the road to Red-stone Creek. Their march was slow, and full of toil, and at the end of two weeks they had gone but 13 miles. Here at Gist's home, where they stopped to rest, word came to Wash-ing-ton that a large force of the French were to be sent out to fight him. Word was sent to the fort to have the men that were there join them with all speed.

They reached Gist's at dusk, and by dawn of the next day all our troops were in that place, where it was at first thought they would wait for the foe.

But this plan they gave up, for it was deemed best to make haste back to the fort, where they might at least screen them-selves from the fire of the foe.

The roads were rough; the heat was great; the food was scant, and the men weak and worn out. There were but few steeds, and these had to bear such great loads that they could not move with speed.

Wash-ing-ton gave up his own horse and went on foot, and the rest of the head men did the same.

The troops from Vir-gin-i-a worked with a will and would take turns and haul the big field guns, while the King's troops, from South Car-o-li-na, walked at their ease, and would not lend a hand, or do a stroke of work.

On the morn of Ju-ly 3, scouts brought word to the fort that the French were but four miles off, and in great force. Wash-ing-ton at once drew up his men on the ground out-side of the fort, to wait for the foe.

Ere noon the French were quite near the fort and the sound of their guns was heard.

Wash-ing-ton thought this was a trick to draw his men out in-to the woods, so he told them to hold their fire till the foe came in sight. But as the French did not show them-selves, though they still kept up their fire, he drew his troops back to the fort and bade them fire at will, and do their best to hit their mark.

The rain fell all day long, so that the men in the fort were half drowned, and some of the guns scarce fit for use.

The fire was kept up till eight o'clock at night, when the French sent word they would like to make terms with our men.

Wash-ing-ton thought it was a trick to find out the state of things in the fort, and for a time gave no heed to the call. The French sent two or three times, and at last brought the terms for Wash-ing-ton to read. They were in French. There was no-thing at hand to write with, so Van Bra-am, who could speak French, was called on to give the key.

It was a queer scene. A light was brought, and held close to his face

so that he could see to read. The rain fell in such sheets that it was hard work to keep up the flame. Van Bra-am mixed up Dutch, French, and Eng-lish in a sad way, while Wash-ing-ton and his chief aids stood near with heads bent, and tried their best to guess what was meant.

They made out at last that the main terms were that the troops might march out of the fort, and fear no harm from French or red-skins as they made their way back to their homes. The drums might beat and the flags fly, and they could take with them all the goods and stores, and all that was in the fort--but the large guns. These the French would break up. And our men should pledge them-selves not to build on the lands which were claimed by the King of France for the space of one year.

The weak had to yield to the strong, and Wash-ing-ton and his men laid down their arms and marched out of the fort.

A note of thanks was sent to Wash-ing-ton, and all his head men but Van Bra-am, who was thought to have read the terms in such a way as to harm our side and serve the French.

But there were those who felt that Van Bra-am was as true as he was brave, and that it was the fault of his head and not his heart, for it was a hard task for a Dutch-man to turn French in-to Eng-lish, and make sense of it.