



In 1752, a new governor came to New France. His job was to control the Ohio River Valley. The governor started building forts on rivers. These forts were also trading posts.

In Virginia, Governor Dinwiddie (DIN-wid-dee) heard about the French forts. He was worried. If anyone was going to settle the Ohio River Valley, Dinwiddie thought, it should be Virginians.

Governor Dinwiddie needed a way to get word to the French. The only way to deliver a message was by having someone hand-carry it. Someone would have to travel over the mountains and through the forest to tell the French to go away.

Dinwiddie turned to a young man named George Washington. He was not an obvious choice for such an important job.

Washington was young, just 21 years old. He spoke no French. However, he had spent time in the woods as a surveyor. He was strong, too. (Washington was well over 6 feet tall.) He was an expert horseman. He could survive a hard journey through the rough country. Washington wanted to go. He wanted to make a name for himself.

Washington hired some other people to go with him on his trip. Christopher Gist served as a guide. He was a trader who knew the area. He knew the American Indians who lived there. Jacob Van Braam, who taught French and fencing, was the interpreter. Four other men were hired to help.

In late November 1753, the group reached the Forks of the Ohio. This is where two rivers come together to form the Ohio River. It is the site of present-day Pittsburgh. Washington wrote in his journal that the site would be an excellent place for a fort.

The next day, the group reached the American Indian town, Logstown. There Washington met a Seneca chief called the Half King. Washington asked the Half King to go with him to see the French. Three other American Indians went, too.

On December 11, the group reached Fort LeBoeuf (luh-BOOF). This was a French fort near Lake Erie. The travel was hard.

Washington's Trip to the French Fort

Oct 31, 1753

Leaves Williamsburg, Virginia, travels to Fredericksburg, Alexandria, and Winchester

Nov 15

Hires Gist and four others and leaves Will's Creek

Nov 23

Passes the Forks of the Ohio and arrives at Logstown the next day

Nov 30

Leaves Logstown with four American Indians including the Half King. Also has an American Indian interpreter.

Dec 4

Arrives at Venango

Dec 6

Leaves Venango

Dec 11

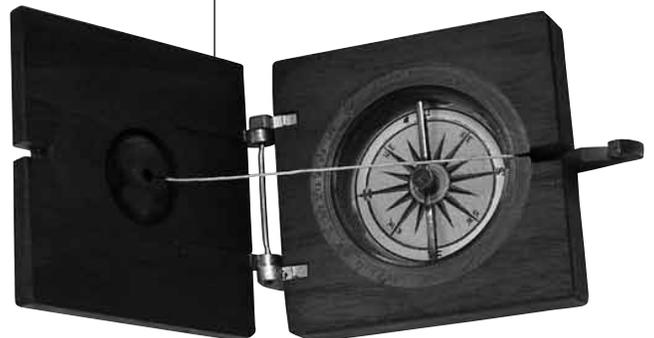
Arrives at Fort LeBoeuf

Dec 16

Leaves Fort LeBoeuf

Dec 22

Arrives at Venango and leaves the next day



Dec 26

Washington and Gist leave the horses, and the rest of their party and start walking

Dec 27

American Indian fires on them

Dec 29

Washington falls off a raft into the Allegheny River near the Forks of the Ohio

Jan 6, 1754

Arrives at Will's Creek

Jan 16

Arrives at Williamsburg

The French commander at Fort LeBoeuf read Dinwiddie's letter. He was polite, but he was also very clear. "As to the summons you send me to retire, I do not think myself obliged to obey it." In other words, the French refused to leave the Ohio River Valley.

Washington wanted to get home. He needed to report back to Dinwiddie. The weather was getting worse. Low water in the rivers often forced them to carry their canoes. They were going very slowly. Finally, Washington and Gist set off by themselves on foot.

Their lives were in danger many times. One time, an American Indian fired a musket at them. They walked all night to get away. When they tried to cross the Allegheny River on a raft, Washington fell off! He quickly pulled himself back onto the raft. The two of them spent the night in wet and freezing clothes on an island. It was so cold overnight the river froze, and in the morning the two walked to shore.

Finally, Washington reached Williamsburg. He had traveled 900 miles in 15 weeks. All the while, he had kept a journal of what he saw and heard. Governor Dinwiddie published Washington's journal and sent it to Europe. Washington had indeed met his goal. He had made a name for himself.