

This Day in History... November 25, 1758

Capture of Fort Duquesne

On November 25, 1758, British and Colonial American forces successfully took over Fort Duquesne from the French. This came near the end of several years of fighting in the French and Indian Wars.

The spot where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio River has long been a significant spot for trade and settlement. In the 1750s, the French began building a series of forts leading to this spot, which upset British settlers who believed it was threatening their land claims.



1929 stamp honoring the canalization of the Ohio River.

In 1753, militia officer George Washington was sent to one of these forts to deliver a letter requesting the French to leave but they refused. The following year, a group of Virginians attempted to build Fort Prince George at the strategic Forks of the Ohio. But within two months, a force of 500 French soldiers arrived, forced the Virginians to leave, and tore down their fort. The French then built Fort Duquesne, named after the Marquis Duquesne, governor general of New France. Hearing of the loss of Fort Prince George, Washington took command of an expedition and headed toward the fort. On May 28, they fought a group of French Canadians in what would come to be known as the first battle of the French and Indian War.

The following year, British General Edward Braddock launched a campaign to retake the Ohio Valley from the French. Its purpose was to capture the French stronghold of Fort Duquesne and push north to Fort Niagara. Unfortunately for Braddock, his plan failed and a much larger French, Canadian, and Native American force ambushed his men. Washington would then lead the survivors to safety following their retreat.

During the summer of 1758, John Forbes assembled a force of between 6,000 and 8,000 men to take on Fort Duquesne. Their first mission was to build a road and a series of supply depots leading to the fort. On September 14, 1758, James Grant led a reconnaissance mission to the fort, but attempted to capture it instead. He suffered a terrible defeat in which nearly half his force was killed or wounded.



1932 stamp pictures Washington as a Colonel before the Revolutionary War.

Then at the end of October, several Native American tribes signed the Treaty of Easton with the British colonists to end their involvement in the fighting. With the loss of Native American support, the French couldn't hold Fort Duquesne on their own. As Forbes's force approached, the French decided to desert the fort and burnt it to the ground on November 24, 1758. The following day, the British colonists officially took control of the fort.

Not long after taking the fort, the British colonists built Fort Pitt on the site of the former Fort Duquesne. As the French and Indian Wars drew to a close, settlements around Fort Pitt grew rapidly, and thus the city of Pittsburgh was born.

During the Civil War, the fort operated as the Fort Pitt Foundry, providing crucial weapons manufacturing for the federal government. The fort's convenient location at the head of the Ohio River made it easy for Union forces to receive their weapons. Among the most significant weapons produced there came in 1864 at President Lincoln's request. The resulting cannon weighed 60 tons and could hurl a half-ton iron ball up to five miles.



Stamp issued for the 200th anniversary of this event. It pictures Washington in the center on his horse.



This battle of Braddock's Field stamp pictures Washington for his role in the battle.



During the Civil War, Lincoln requested the foundry at Fort Pitt create a massive cannon.

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