British leaders in London were shocked to hear about the defeat of American military leader George Washington (1732–1799; see entry) at Fort Necessity. Although some of them did not want to enter the French and Indian War (known in Europe as the Seven Years’ War), others were determined to expand British land holdings in North America by removing the French from the Ohio Country. But Washington’s defeat had convinced them that the American colonists were no match for the French. They decided to send an experienced British general and two regiments of well-trained British soldiers to carry out their plans.

Major General Edward Braddock (1695–1755; see entry), who arrived in America in early 1755, carried orders from King George II (1683–1760) of England. These orders named Braddock commander-in-chief of all British and American armed forces and gave him full responsibility for organizing the defense of the colonies. French leaders in Paris soon learned about the British plans. In response, they decided to send thousands of French troops across the Atlantic Ocean to help defend their colonies in New France. They also began se-

1755: British Forces Suffer a Serious Defeat
secret negotiations with Austria to end its alliance with Great Britain. If successful, this move would shift the balance of power in Europe toward France.

Braddock takes charge
A blunt and arrogant officer, Braddock felt that his position as commander-in-chief gave him power over the colonial governors, and he began issuing orders as soon as he arrived in North America. For example, he announced that he was setting up a common defense fund to support his military operations and that he expected all of the colonies to contribute money to it. He also informed the colonial governors that they were to provide supplies, quarters, and transportation for his forces, as well as additional soldiers from their colonial militias. This caused a problem with the Pennsylvania Assembly, which was controlled by members of the Quaker religion. Because Quakers are pacifists (believers in nonviolence), the Assembly refused to send money to support Braddock’s army. Braddock responded by threatening to use some of his forces against Pennsylvania.

In April 1755, the general called a meeting of all the colonial governors. He started the session by scolding the governors for not delivering the money and supplies he wanted. Then Braddock outlined his ambitious plans for pushing the French out of the Ohio Country and defending the American colonies. These plans, which had been designed by British leaders in London, involved four military actions that were supposed to take place at the same time. First, Braddock and his two regiments of British soldiers would attack Fort Duquesne, the French stronghold at the Forks of the Ohio. Second, two regiments under Massachusetts governor William
Shirley (1694–1771) would seize the French fort at Niagara on Lake Ontario. Third, William Johnson (1715–1774; see entry) and a mixed regiment of colonial soldiers and Mohawk warriors would attack Fort St. Frédéric, located at Crown Point on Lake Champlain (in the northeastern corner of modern New York State). Fourth, an expedition of colonial soldiers from Boston would capture Fort Beauséjour in Nova Scotia (on the Atlantic coast of modern Canada).

Braddock’s plans surprised and alarmed the colonial governors. They noticed a number of flaws that could create serious problems for the armies involved. For example, the British leaders who developed the plans did not seem to understand wilderness conditions. Braddock and his two regiments planned to follow the road Washington had cut through the Allegheny Mountains to get to Fort Duquesne from Virginia. But this road was rough and narrow, and would need a great deal of work before it could be used by wagons hauling heavy artillery. The other expeditions planned to use boats to transport men and supplies to their target forts on rivers. But these rivers had wide variations in water levels and were often choked with fallen trees.

British planners also expected the colonies to contribute enough money and supplies to support all four military campaigns. But this placed a great deal of strain on the limited resources of the colonies. As a result, the commanders of the four expeditions had to compete for soldiers, boats, wagons, guns, clothing, shelter, and other supplies. The expeditions thus became more expensive, took longer to prepare, and had lower chances for success.

People to Know

Edward Braddock (1695–1755): British military leader who served as commander-in-chief of British forces in North America in 1755 and was killed in a disastrous early battle on the Monongahela River.

Baron Ludwig August (also known as Jean-Armand) Dieskau (1701–1767): French military leader who lost the Battle of Lake George and was wounded and captured by the British.

William Johnson (1715–1774): British general who served as chief of Indian affairs and won the Battle of Lake George.

William Shirley (1694–1771): Governor of Massachusetts who served as commander-in-chief of British forces in North America following the death of Edward Braddock.

George Washington (1732–1799): American military and political leader who took part in the early battles of the French and Indian War and went on to lead the American Revolution and serve as the first president of the United States.
The colonial governors tried to tell Braddock about the flaws in his plan. They insisted that they could not provide all the men and supplies Braddock was requesting. They came up with several ideas about how to change his plans to make them work better. Instead of launching four expeditions at the same time, for example, they suggested that he concentrate his efforts on capturing the French fort at Niagara. This would isolate Fort Duquesne and other forts in the Ohio Country, preventing them from receiving troops and supplies. When Braddock rejected this idea, the governors suggested that Braddock start his march to Fort Duquesne from Pennsylvania instead of Virginia. This would cut the length of his journey and allow his troops to travel on an improved road. But Braddock refused to listen to this idea as well. He insisted on following his orders exactly as they were written by the king and other British leaders.

**Braddock’s forces advance toward Fort Duquesne**

Just as the governors had warned, Braddock faced a number of delays in getting the supplies he needed. On May 29, 1755, he finally began marching toward Fort Duquesne with twenty-two hundred men. Most of these men were “regular” soldiers with the British Army. They wore fancy uniforms with bright red coats and considered themselves well-trained, professional soldiers. Braddock’s army also included one hundred “irregular” soldiers from the Virginia militia, as well as some engineers and frontiersmen to improve the road and serve as guides. The irregular soldiers were not part of the formal British Army, and generally had less military training and poorer equipment than the regular soldiers. Another
member of Braddock's army was George Washington, who had asked to join because he hoped to learn from the experienced British general. Washington's knowledge of the wilderness would give the troops an advantage they would not otherwise have, and Braddock welcomed him as a volunteer aide on his staff.

Braddock's forces made slow progress over the 120 miles to Fort Duquesne. As they lugged heavy artillery and wagons full of supplies through the mountains—cutting down trees and blasting huge boulders to clear the road as they went—they sometimes advanced only two miles per day. As he rode along with Braddock, Washington learned that his commanding officer knew very little about wilderness warfare. The general expected to meet the enemy on a field of battle, where his men could form rows and take turns firing and reloading. But Washington knew that the French and their Indian (Native American) allies were more likely to use surprise ambushes and to fire from behind cover of rocks and boulders.