

George Washington Letter to Mary Ball Washington, July 18, 1755

Guiding Question

- How did George Washington act virtuously during the Battle of the Monongahela?

Objectives

- ☒ I can describe Washington's actions during the Battle of Monongahela and explain how they show leadership under pressure.
- ☒ I can identify examples of civic virtues, such as responsibility or courage, in Washington's decisions during the battle.
- ☒ I can analyze how Washington's experience at Monongahela shaped his development as a leader.

Scaffolding note: Vocabulary defined in text.

Background Information

In 1755, British General Edward Braddock took a large force of colonial and British troops to attack Fort Duquesne, located in modern-day Pittsburgh. Colonel George Washington served as an aide-de-camp to the general. He acted as personal assistant, secretary, and advisor to the general in this role and demonstrated significant leadership skills.

Braddock's forces encountered French soldiers and their Native American allies on the road to Fort Duquesne in the Battle of the Monongahela. When their enemy suddenly attacked from the cover of woods, the British and colonial troops quickly fell into a panic, which led to a devastating and chaotic defeat. Braddock was mortally wounded, and Washington stepped in to organize an orderly retreat, even though he was not part of the formal chain of command. He wrote the following letter to his mother in which he described the battle.

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Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-01-02-0167>

Text	Notes/Summary
When we came there, we were attacked by a body of French and Indns [Indians] whose number...did not exceed 300 Men; ours consisted of about 1,300 well armed Troops; chiefly, Regular Soldiers [the British professional army], who were struck with such a panic, that they behaved with more cowardice than it is possible to conceive [imagine]...	
The Virginia Troops [the Virginia militia, which Washington was an officer in] showed a good deal of Bravery, & were near all killed; for I believe out of 3 Companies that were there, there is scarce 30 Men left alive...	
In short the dastardly [unacceptable] behavior of those they call regular's, exposed all other's that were inclined [feeling willing to do] to do their duty to almost certain death; and at last, in despite of all the efforts of the Officer's to the Contrary [opposite], they broke, and run as Sheep pursued by dogs; and it was impossible to rally them.	
I luckily escaped with a wound, though I had four Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me... I was the only person then left to distribute the Generals 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... for above 10 Days; I am still in a weak and Feeble [lacking strength] condition which induces me to halt here 2 or 3 Days in hopes of recovering a little Strength, to enable me to proceed homewards.	

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. In your own words, describe the Battle of Monongahela.
2. At Jumonville Glen in 1754, Washington decided to attack French forces, which resulted in the death of a French official and an outbreak of war. Compare and contrast Washington's leadership decisions at Jumonville Glen with the Battle of Monongahela. How might the first battle have affected his decisions in the second?
3. In what way did Washington demonstrate the civic virtue of responsibility, defined as: "Acting on good judgment about what is right or wrong even when it is not popular," in the Battle of Monongahela?
4. Why might Washington have felt frustrated with the British regular soldiers during the battle?

