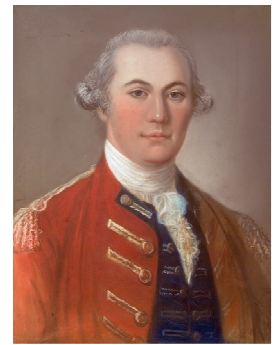


FORT LIGONIER

The Council of War

November 11, 1758



Background:

From the records of Colonel Henry Bouquet, second in command at Fort Ligonier, a letter written on November 11, 1758 outlines the arguments for advancing to take Fort Duquesne and the arguments against it. General John Forbes called this Council of War at Fort Ligonier in order to determine whether to attack the French at Fort Duquesne in November or wait until the spring of 1759. Eight officers were in attendance: **Colonels Henry Bouquet, Sir John St. Clair, George Washington, James Burd, John Armstrong, William Byrd, Archibald Montgomery, and Hugh Mercer.** At this meeting, Forbes decided to stay at Fort Ligonier until the next spring. On November 12, however, following a friendly fire incident that almost killed Washington, a captive revealed the weak state of Fort Duquesne. As a result of this information, Forbes quickly changed his earlier decision and marched on Fort Duquesne, only to discover that the French fortress had been abandoned and burned.

Materials:

Two or three sets of Name Cards for the eight Officers attending the Council of War

A piece of paper divided into two columns for each group to make a list of Pros and Cons

Procedure: For a role-playing activity, assign the names of the officers who attended the Council of War to students in groups of eight to discuss the following arguments. Then instruct each group of officers to make a list of the Pros and the Cons for attacking Fort Duquesne in November, 1758. Have the students discuss what decision they would have made on that day in 1758. Choose one student to portray General Forbes, who will make the ultimate decision from the arguments presented by each of the groups. End with a discussion of the decision that the General did make.

- 1. The hope of driving the enemy from the Ohio thereby assuring us possession of it.*
- 2. The lack of clothing to protect the troops from the cold, and the impossibility of obtaining any.*
- 3. The hope of getting rid of the Indians, who have settle along this river and who continually overrun and ravage our provinces.*
- 4. The scarcity of provisions and the uncertainty of obtaining any by a convoy because bad weather has made the roads almost impassable. The shortage of horse, and of grass to feed them makes them so weak that but a little use can be expected of them.*
- 5. The risk of losing the ordnance [cannons] if bad weather, the lack of provisions, or a defeat forces us to retreat without capturing the place.*
- 6. Finally, the hope of justifying the expenses of the expedition and the hopes of our Colonies who, ignorant of the difficulties the enterprise involves, regard the Fort as a very easy objective for the body of troops undertaking this expedition.*
- 7. The impossibility of providing this post with provisions for the winter if we and the army consume that [food which we have] on hand.*
- 8. The reduction of the Army to one half its normal strength and the absolute lack of any knowledge about the enemy's forces in spite of all our efforts to obtain it.*

(Taken from *The Papers of Henry Bouquet, The Forbes Expedition volume II*, page 600).