

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND THE DEFENSE OF PENNSYLVANIA, 1754-1757

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A FEW days after signing the Definitive Treaty of Peace between Great Britain and the United States in 1783, Benjamin Franklin sent his old friend Josiah Quincy a long and chatty letter. At the end, after mentioning the treaty, he wrote fervently: "May we never see another War! for in my opinion *there never was a good War, or a bad Peace.*"<sup>1</sup> Franklin knew whereof he wrote. The seventy-seven years that he had lived had witnessed many wars in Europe and several of these had involved armed conflict in America as well. During three of these wars Franklin had put aside his private affairs and had assumed a leading role in the defense of his city and of Pennsylvania in general.

Franklin's part in the second of the three wars of his mature years is the subject of our immediate attention here, and more particularly his part in the defense of Pennsylvania during the early stages of the conflict known in world history as the Seven Years' War and in America often called the French and Indian War. From the first threatened hostilities in the winter of 1753-54 till the Assembly sent him abroad to represent them in England in 1757 Franklin played a major role in the efforts of Pennsylvania to defend itself against the incursions of the French and their Indian allies. Part of his service was essentially political, as an increasingly influential member of the Assembly; part of it was in the field, as an active organizer and even as a commander of troops on the threatened frontier.

His position in Pennsylvania politics during this period was a peculiar and difficult one. He was an active member of the anti-

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<sup>1</sup>Franklin to Josiah Quincy, September 11, 1783, American Philosophical Society, printed in Albert H. Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (N. Y., 1905-07), IX, 96.

proprietary faction, the leadership and most of the membership of which consisted of Quakers. So long as peace prevailed Franklin and the Friends in the Assembly could unite whole-heartedly in political opposition to the governors and the other proprietary officials. But as soon as war began to threaten and questions of defense and of appropriations for military services came to the fore Franklin found himself sympathizing with the governors' demands for action and support, and opposed to the policies of obstruction and evasion adopted by his fellow assemblymen. Yet he was as unwilling as they were to yield to the proprietary position on the political and constitutional issues that were involved in almost all the legislative proposals brought forward during the period of crisis. He was deeply distressed at the attitude of the pacifists and equally incensed at the unyielding attitude of the proprietary governors. In time, however, he, together with some other non-Quaker members and those Friends who were least extreme in their pacifist position, were able to frame measures which side-stepped to some degree the constitutional issues and so won the grudging acceptance of the governors. Through it all Franklin's reputation as an adroit parliamentarian and his position as a political leader grew steadily.

The political problems and difficulties that arose first began to come into focus in February, 1754. During the previous summer the French had built forts at Presqu' Isle (now Erie) and on French Creek near the present town of Waterford in Erie County, preliminary to advancing in force into the upper Ohio Valley. In August, Secretary of State Holderness sent a circular letter to the colonial governors directing them to warn off any foreign subjects encroaching on his Majesty's lands. If the invaders should persist, he wrote, the governors were "to repel Force by Force," but were not to make use of their armed forces "excepting within the undoubted limits of His Majesty's Dominions." In accordance with these instructions Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent George Washington on his famous trip the following winter to warn off the French, who were already established in the north-western part of what is now the state of Pennsylvania. Informed of the failure of this effort, Governor Hamilton laid before the Pennsylvania Assembly, February 14, a copy of Holderness's

letter and other documents and asked for a grant of supplies in order that a Pennsylvania contingent might join with Virginia troops early in March "to repel Force by Force," as the secretary of state had put it.<sup>2</sup>

The first question before the Quaker-dominated Assembly was whether the French had actually come within the "undoubted limits" of Pennsylvania. No one could say for sure, because the western boundaries, as stipulated in William Penn's charter, had never been surveyed. The governor and Council interrogated a number of Indian traders and others who had traveled in the west and sent the information they provided to an Assembly committee of which Franklin was a member.<sup>3</sup>

As one who wanted to stop the French advances, Franklin certainly would want to establish that they were indeed within the provincial bounds; but the Quakers on the committee would prefer to report that Presqu' Isle and French Creek were beyond Pennsylvania's "undoubted limits" so they could deny the necessity of repelling "Force by Force." The trader's reports mentioned various places through which they had traveled: Three Springs (in the present Huntington County); Franktown, near the present Altoona; Ray's Town, later renamed Bedford; Laurel Hill, now pierced by a tunnel on the Pennsylvania Turnpike; the Indian village of Shannopin's Town, now a part of Pittsburgh; and Venango, later appropriately renamed Franklin. If allowance were made for the twists and turnings of the paths, then the travelers' estimates of distances between these places would seem to place the French forts well east of Pennsylvania's true western bounds—so stated a passage in the committee's report for which Franklin was probably responsible. But—and here the Quaker members had their say—the estimates on which this conclusion was based

<sup>2</sup> *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania, 1753-54* (Phila., 1754), 14-18. Hereafter the printed journals of the Assembly will be cited as *Votes* followed by the year covered and the page reference.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1851), V, 730-731, 750-751. Hereafter cited as *Pa. Col. Recs.* Hamilton had himself expressed dissatisfaction with the vagueness of Holderness's instructions and the uncertainty of the western boundaries in letters to Dinwiddie and Holderness. *Ibid.*, 701, 709-710.

"must be submitted to the House."<sup>4</sup> The Quaker majority of the Assembly seized upon this loophole and informed the governor that the western limits of the province had not been ascertained to their satisfaction; therefore they proposed to do nothing for defense at that time and were "inclined to make a short Adjournment." Accordingly, they declared themselves an eight weeks' vacation.<sup>5</sup>

Unwilling to delay so long, Hamilton called the Assembly back into session about three weeks later and, employing a euphemism already understood and destined to become much more familiar, urged them to make a grant "for the King's use" in support of the military effort the Virginians were about to undertake.<sup>6</sup> By a bare majority the Assembly voted to make such a grant. Apparently the committee appointed to bring in a bill, of which Franklin was a member, could not agree on the sum to be appropriated; so they left the amount blank when they presented the measure to the House. The first proposal made on the floor, to grant £20,000, was defeated 8 to 25; only two votes were gained when the sum was reduced to £15,000, and one more with the further reduction to £10,000. By the time a proposal to grant £5,000 was voted on, Franklin and his defense-minded allies were so disgusted at this niggardly attitude that they switched their votes to the negative in protest. So the whole proposal failed and the Assembly granted nothing at that session.<sup>7</sup>

Four days after the House adjourned, a French force coming down the Allegheny reached the forks of the Ohio and forced the surrender of the small fort the Virginians had erected there. Word of this defeat reached Philadelphia on May 3 three days before the Assembly was scheduled to meet again. Hamilton renewed his request for money and the House again went through the ritual of voting on how much to give. The sum of £20,000 was again decisively beaten as was £15,000, but the growing danger converted some members, and a grant of £10,000 in paper bills of credit squeaked through by a vote of 17 to 15.<sup>8</sup> Now a new difficulty appeared. The Assembly voted to finance the appro-

<sup>4</sup> *Votes*, 1753-54, 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41, 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-49, 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-56.

priation by extending the existing excise tax for ten years. Governor Hamilton insisted that four years was long enough. The House responded by declaring they had an exclusive right to decide on the terms of money bills; neither would give way and again nothing was done. The Assembly adjourned May 18 for three months more without making any appropriation for the emergency.<sup>9</sup>

Franklin was away from Philadelphia during most of the next ten months. June and part of July were occupied by his participation in the Albany Congress and he spent from the beginning of September, 1754, to the end of February, 1755, on a trip to New England on post-office business. During these absences George Washington and his small force of Virginia troops were forced to surrender to the French at Fort Necessity, and Hamilton was succeeded as governor by Robert Hunter Morris, a New Jersey man who frankly admitted that he loved argument and dispute.<sup>10</sup> During his administration the official relations between the Assembly and the proprietary executive became much worse than they had been before.

The day after Franklin resumed his Assembly seat in March, 1755, Morris told the House that General Edward Braddock had arrived in Virginia as commander in chief and wanted a post established to carry his dispatches between Winchester and Philadelphia to facilitate his intended campaign against the French at Fort Duquesne. Franklin, as postmaster general, agreed to set up such a postal route and the Assembly voted to pay the costs.<sup>11</sup> When, early in April, Morris and the governors of Massachusetts and New York left Philadelphia for a conference with Braddock at Alexandria, Franklin, accompanied by his son William, went

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-66.

<sup>10</sup> Writing in his autobiography thirty-four years later, Franklin remembered that he had met Morris on his trip to New England in 1754 and, in answer to a question, had assured the newly appointed governor that he could have a comfortable administration if he would take care not to enter into any dispute with the Assembly. "My dear Friend," replied Morris, "how can you advise my avoiding Disputes. You know I love Disputing; it is one of my greatest Pleasures." Franklin then described how the governor's father had trained his children to argue with each other at the table for his own diversion. Max Farrand, ed., *Benjamin Franklin's Memoirs. Parallel Text Edition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949), 330. Hereafter cited as *Par. Text* edit.

<sup>11</sup> *Votes*, 1754-55, 70, 74-75, 87.

with them as far as Annapolis and then rode westward to Winchester, Virginia, to arrange for the new postal route.<sup>12</sup>

On his return trip he stopped at Frederick, Maryland, where Braddock had arrived on his way to the army rendezvous at Fort Cumberland on Wills Creek. In his autobiography Franklin tells in some detail the story of what followed and there survive numerous documents to support his account.<sup>13</sup>

Braddock complained that Virginia and Maryland had let him down badly by supplying only a small fraction of the number of wagons and horses needed for his army's advance. Franklin replied that it was a pity the troops had not landed in Pennsylvania, where nearly every farmer had his wagon. Thereupon the general asked him as "a man of Interest there" to undertake the procurement of the vitally needed transport. Franklin agreed, rates of pay were established, the Pennsylvanian received some £800 for expenses, and he set out for Lancaster on April 23. There he composed and had printed, in English and in German, a broadside advertising the call for wagons, horses, and drivers. Braddock's needs were quickly met and the army was able to march, though Franklin had to pledge his personal credit to pay for any losses.<sup>14</sup> The general and several of his officers testified gratefully to his service. "His Waggon and Horses," Braddock wrote the Secretary of State, ". . . are indeed my whole Dependence."<sup>15</sup> When Franklin returned to Philadelphia the Assembly formally thanked him for his services.<sup>16</sup> Soon he was actively engaged in recruiting workmen to build a road west from Ship-

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, April 13, 1755, American Philosophical Society. This and most of the other manuscripts cited below for the years covered by this paper will be printed in volumes V-VI of Leonard W. Labaree, *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1959- ). The locations of the manuscripts will be indicated and if they are printed in the Smyth edition of Franklin's *Writings*, volume and page numbers will be given. The letter here cited does not appear in Smyth.

<sup>13</sup> Par. Text edit., 336-346. For a detailed account of this episode, with facsimile reproductions of several documents and full citations of sources, see Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., and Leonard W. Labaree, "Franklin and the 'Wagon Affair,' 1757," American Philosophical Society *Proceedings*, CI (1957), 551-558.

<sup>14</sup> Braddock's successor, General William Shirley, finally arranged for payment of the wagoners' losses suffered in Braddock's defeat and so saved Franklin from financial ruin.

<sup>15</sup> Braddock to Sir Thomas Robinson, June 5, 1755, Public Record Office, C. O. 5: 46, 24-29.

<sup>16</sup> *Votes*, 1754-55, 89.

pensburg through the wilderness to the Monongahela. James Burd, who was in charge of the work, reported on the "high Spirits" of the men, who "seemed willing to tear the Mountains to pieces."<sup>17</sup> At the end of May Franklin was again advertising for wagons at the request of an Assembly committee, to carry from Philadelphia to Wills Creek the oats and corn they had bought to supply the army.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the constant bickering between the Assembly and the governor continued. Franklin was disgusted. "I am heartily sick of our present Situation," he wrote an English friend at the end of June. "I like neither the Governor's Conduct nor the Assembly's, and having some share in the Confidence of both, I have endeavor'd to reconcile 'em, but in vain, and between 'em they make me very uneasy. . . . The Assembly ride restive; and the Governor, tho' he spurs with both Heels, at the same time reins-in with both Hands, so that the Public Business can never move forward; and he remains like St. George in the Sign, always a Horseback, and never going on."<sup>19</sup>

Wagons, horses, supply roads, and supplies, in the provision of all of which Franklin played a major part, enabled Braddock to undertake his march toward Fort Duquesne, but they did not prevent him from suffering military disaster. When news of the Battle of the Monongahela, July 9, reached Philadelphia, Morris called the Assembly into special session. With commendable expedition they voted to grant £50,000 for the King's use, to be raised by a tax on all estates, both real and personal, in the province.<sup>20</sup> Now appeared the political issue which was to cause the greatest difficulty in the future and which, more than any other, was responsible for the Assembly's sending Franklin to England in 1757 to represent their point of view. The bill taxed all property, but the governor sent it back insisting that the proprietary estates should be

<sup>17</sup> *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VI, 404; Franklin to Edward Shippen, May 24, 1755, Library of Congress; Franklin's pass for John Bicker and John Myfield, May 30, 1755, going to work on the road, American Philosophical Society. Similar MS passes for other workmen are in Harvard College Library, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Historical Society of Pennsylvania. A full account of the road building is in Lily Lee Nixon, *James Burd: Frontier Defender 1726-1793* (Phila., 1941), 21-34.

<sup>18</sup> Printed in *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 22, 1755.

<sup>19</sup> Franklin to Peter Collinson, June 26, 1755, Pierpont Morgan Library, Smyth, *Writings*, III, 265.

<sup>20</sup> *Votes*, 1754-55, 114-115, 118-120.

exempted. Many long messages passed between the two sides on this subject, but neither would yield, so, in spite of the great emergency, the bill failed of passage.<sup>21</sup> When it became apparent that no major appropriation would be made, the Assembly appointed a committee of five members, including Franklin, and gave them £1,000 from funds under Assembly control to be spent with the governor's approbation to provide arms and ammunition for the terrified inhabitants of frontier townships.<sup>22</sup> This was merely a stop-gap measure, of course, but it did indicate that some of the less extreme Quaker assemblymen had come to recognize the necessity for armed defense. During the weeks and months that followed, Franklin and Evan Morgan became the two most active members of the committee and between them performed most of its work of buying and distributing arms.<sup>23</sup>

When the new Assembly met in the autumn of 1755 the legislative stalemate continued, but the situation on the frontier was growing steadily worse. Raiding parties of French and Indians, heretofore operating mainly in the western parts of Maryland and Virginia, attacked some of the settlements near the Susquehanna in October, and the inhabitants of the more exposed townships redoubled their earlier clamor for arms and for protection. Petitions also began to come in demanding that the Assembly stop its bickerings with the governor and that the Quaker leaders no longer neglect the defense of the province because of their religious scruples. Early in November the Assembly agreed to appropriate £60,000 for the King's use, but again insisted on taxing the proprietary estates and Morris again insisted that they be exempted. Further wordy messages passed between them.<sup>24</sup> The present-day reader of the journals is inclined to murmur at this point: "This is where I came in."

Actually, however, the political situation began to break. For

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-127, 130-157, *passim*. The text of the bill and the governor's proposed amendments are printed, with separate pagination, at the end of this volume of the *Votes*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1755-56, 165-167; *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VI, 663, 679; Franklin to Richard Partridge, October 25, 1755, American Philosophical Society (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 293); Franklin to James Read, November 2, 1755, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 295-296).

<sup>24</sup> *Votes*, 1755-56, 10-29, *passim*. In a counter-address to the Assembly some Quakers threatened to refuse payment of the tax if the £60,000 bill should pass. *Ibid.*, 14.



one thing, the pressure of events impressed more and more of the moderate or nominal Quakers that measures for defense were vitally necessary and that those who had no conscientious scruples against bearing arms for the protection of their families and communities should be allowed to do so. For another thing, the proprietors in England had come to realize that they must share in the cost of protecting both their Pennsylvania estates and the province in general.

The first rift in the clouds appeared on November 19 when the Assembly granted Franklin leave to bring in a militia bill. After amendments the measure passed the House (four strict Quakers formally recording their dissent), and the governor approved it on the 26th.<sup>25</sup> This is in some respects one of the most curious acts establishing a military system ever passed by an American legislative body. It begins with a long preamble citing the pacifist principles on which Pennsylvania had been settled and governed but pointing out that many inhabitants of other religious denominations had indicated their willingness "to fight in Defence of their Country, their Wives, their Families and Estates." Therefore the act permitted such freemen as wished to do so to form themselves into companies and elect their officers, to whom the governor was to issue commissions if he thought fit. The regimental officers, elected by the company officers and similarly commissioned by the governor, were to draw up articles of war for the government of the troops, and the men were to be asked to accept them individually and voluntarily.

Members of the proprietary party ridiculed the bill. Governor Morris declared that it would "never answer the Purpose of defending this Province" and Chief Justice Allen called it "a solemn Farce . . . impractical and ridiculous."<sup>26</sup> Franklin defended it stoutly.<sup>27</sup> There is no question but that he would have drafted a much stronger measure if he had thought he could get one passed, but he was a realistic and an experienced politician. That the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31. An Act for the better Ordering and Regulating such as are willing and desirous to be united for Military Purposes within this Province, *Anno Regni Georgii II. Regis, . . . Vigesimo Nono* (Phila., 1755), 243-247; 1 *Pennsylvania Archives*, II, 516-519.

<sup>26</sup> *Votes*, 1755-56, 37; Lewis B. Walker, ed., *The Burd Papers. Extracts from Chief Justice William Allen's Letter Book* (n.p., 1897), 30.

<sup>27</sup> "A Dialogue between X, Y, and Z, concerning the present State of Affairs in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 18, 1755.

Assembly, three quarters of whose membership has been estimated to have consisted of at least nominal Quakers, could have been persuaded to reverse even to this extent the consistently pacific traditions of the province was an achievement of considerable magnitude. How much the measure actually contributed to the defense of Pennsylvania is problematical. The Privy Council in England disallowed the law as "improper and inadequate," but before the news of the disallowance reached Philadelphia in October, 1756,<sup>28</sup> eleven months had passed, during which the people of the province had a chance to get used to the idea of a militia system, however limited that system was.

The second action in the fall of 1755 which contributed to a more vigorous defense came from the proprietors. When word of Braddock's defeat reached England the secretary of state warned them that their governor was being criticized at home for failing to cooperate with the Assembly in the emergency, thereupon they sent Morris an order on the receiver general for £5,000 "as a free Gift to the Publick" to be used "for the common Security of the Province."<sup>29</sup> The governor reported this action to the Assembly while the Militia Bill was still pending. The House promptly voted that in view of this contribution "it would not be reasonable or just, at this Time," to tax the proprietary estates. A committee including Franklin quickly drew up a new appropriation bill which reduced the amount to be raised by taxes to £55,000 and exempted the proprietary estates from its provisions; Morris accepted it and it became a law two days after the Assembly learned of the proprietors' action.<sup>30</sup> The act placed control of the proprietors' gift and the money appropriated in the hands of a commission of seven members, two councilors and five assemblymen, one of whom inevitably was Franklin.

Shortly before the passage of these two acts word reached Philadelphia of an attack upon the Moravian settlement at Gnadenhuetten in Northampton County just beyond the Lehigh River Gap

<sup>28</sup> *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VII, 272-278. Governor Denny communicated the disallowance to the Provincial Council, October 15, 1756, *ibid.*, 268.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 731; *Votes*, 1755-56, 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 47, 48, 49; An Act for granting the Sum of Sixty Thousand Pounds to the King's Use, and for striking Fifty-five Thousand Pounds thereof in Bills of Credit, and to provide a fund for sinking the same, *Anno Regni Georgii II. Regis*, . . . *Vigesimo Nono*, 247-258.

in the Blue Mountains. On December 18 three of the commissioners named in the Supply Act—James Hamilton, the former governor, Joseph Fox of the Assembly, and Franklin—set out with fifty provincial cavalymen for Northampton County to look into the situation there and do all they could to put the area into a proper posture of defense.<sup>31</sup> At Bethlehem, the Moravian headquarters, they found the people calm but alert and provided with arms they had bought in New York. At Easton the situation was different: refugees had poured in from the more exposed areas and, as Hamilton put it, “the Country was under the greatest Consternation.” The commissioners remained at Easton ten days; provisions and additional troops were brought up; arrangements were made for building block houses; and William Parsons, one of Franklin’s old friends from Junto days, received a commission as major in charge of the defenses. None of the commissioners held any military title on this expedition; Hamilton was the senior member of the trio and at first seems to have issued the orders, but as the stay at Easton continued it appears that Franklin assumed more and more the leadership of the expedition. Their mission accomplished, the commissioners traveled back through Bethlehem to Reading for a conference with Governor Morris, arriving New Year’s Day of 1756.<sup>32</sup>

While this meeting was going on word arrived of another Indian attack on Gnadenhuetten, and the defeat of a body of troops sent up to guard the settlement. About twenty soldiers had been killed; the Lehigh Gap was open to the enemy.<sup>33</sup> Something had to be done

<sup>31</sup> A useful and colorful account of Franklin’s activities in the field during the next seven weeks, but which needs correction in some details, is J. Bennett Nolan, *General Benjamin Franklin. The Military Career of a Philosopher* (Phila., 1936). The rank given Franklin in the title was conferred by the Moravian Diary in Bethlehem, not by Governor Morris.

<sup>32</sup> James Hamilton to Robert Hunter Morris, December 22, 1755, *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VI, 763-765 (misdated in the printed version December 25); extract of a letter from Easton (probably by Franklin), December 25, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 1, 1756; draft instructions to Major William Parsons, in Franklin’s hand, December 29, New York Public Library; Hamilton’s orders to Captains Martin and Craig, December 29, 1 *Pa. Arch.*, II, 541; Franklin to Conrad Weiser and others, December 30, R. W. Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania; Morris to the Provincial Council, Reading, January 3, 1756, *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VI, 770-771.

<sup>33</sup> William Hayes to Morris and the commissioners, January 3, 1756, and extract of a letter from Reading (probably by Franklin), January 6, both in *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 8, 1756; Morris to the Provincial Council, January 5, *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VI, 771-772.

and done quickly and the governor asked Franklin to do it. Armed with a military commission from Morris to command in Northampton County,<sup>34</sup> but without formal military rank or title, Franklin set out once more for the exposed frontier. He arrived at Bethlehem on January 7. From there he sent detachments to protect the most exposed settlements, but he threatened the inhabitants that he would withdraw the guards unless they would do everything they could to protect themselves. He recruited new troops, did what was possible for the relief of refugees, and then on January 15 marched out for Gnadenhuetten with about 100 men.<sup>35</sup>

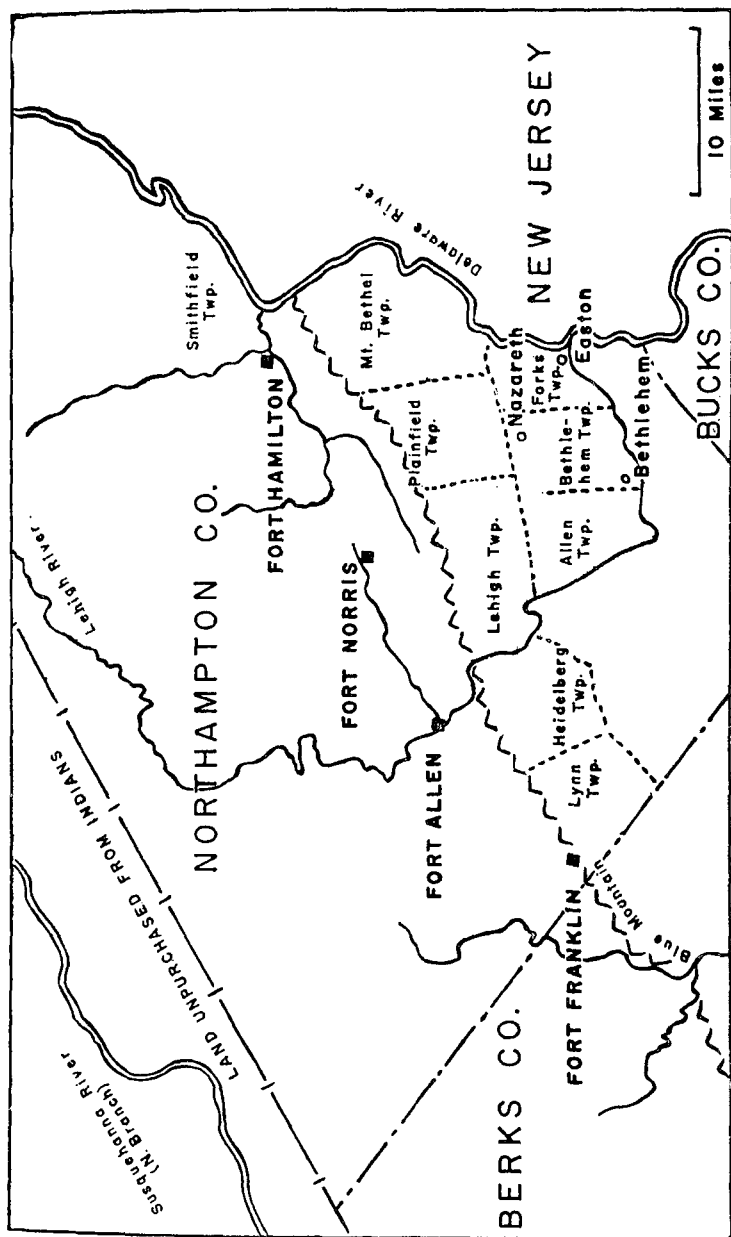
His chief mission was to build and garrison a series of forts beyond the mountains which would protect the country from Indian attacks. On January 18, Franklin reached the ruins of Gnadenhuetten, near which he planned to build the principal defensive works. The first tasks were to build a temporary breastwork to protect the camp and to bury the dead, whose bodies still lay on the ground from the last Indian attack. Then Franklin's men began their fort. To this structure, in the present town of Weissport, he gave the name Fort Allen in honor of Chief Justice William Allen, one of Philadelphia's wealthiest citizens. At a few miles' distance in each direction detachments erected lesser flanking defenses: Fort Norris, near the present Kresgeville, named for Isaac Norris, speaker of the Assembly, and Fort Franklin, near Snyders.<sup>36</sup> Together with Fort Hamilton at the present Stroudsburg, planned in December when the three commissioners were at Easton, these works provided a system of defenses along the northern edge of the Blue Mountains which might, if properly manned and alertly commanded, protect the communities on the other side of the barrier ridge.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Robert Hunter Morris: commission to Benjamin Franklin, January 5, 1756, American Philosophical Society.

<sup>35</sup> Franklin to Morris, January 14, 1756, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1 *Pa. Arch.*, II, 548-550; Franklin to Deborah Franklin, January 15, 1756, American Philosophical Society (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 323).

<sup>36</sup> Franklin himself left this last fort unnamed, but by the late spring of that year the people of the area were calling it Fort Franklin and, as William Parsons wrote him, "I don't blame them for it." Parsons to Franklin, June 19, 1756, Henry E. Huntington Library.

<sup>37</sup> There are numerous documents reporting or illuminating this part of Franklin's service on the frontier. The most useful include: Franklin (?) to ———, January 20, 1756, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 29, 1756; Franklin



THE SCENE OF FRANKLIN'S FRONTIER SERVICE, 1755-56  
Adapted, with permission, from William A. Hunter, *Forts on the Pennsylvania Frontier, 1753-1758* (Harrisburg, 1960), 215.

These forts would doubtless have aroused the scorn of any competent European military engineer, but they were the best that could be provided in a hurry. They consisted primarily of wooden stockades surrounding two or three log buildings and were hastily erected of green timber cut on the spot. Forts Allen and Norris had bastions in which swivel guns were mounted; Fort Franklin seems not to have been furnished with artillery. Their chief purpose was to provide accommodations for troops, which could be defended against hostile assault, from which ranging parties could move out to scour the woods for parties of Indians, and to which the remaining settlers could flee in case of imminent danger. Commanding the main approaches to the chief pass through the mountains, they were intended, crude though they were, as deterrents to the hit-and-run tactics of Indian warfare.

Having completed his task and appointed commanders for his forts and for the entire region, Franklin, the amateur soldier, ended his expedition and set out for home, reaching Philadelphia late in the night of February 5. He had been away just seven weeks.

It had not been an easy time for him. He marked his fiftieth birthday one day while trying to get through the Lehigh Gap with his troops during a rainstorm, and in the eighteenth century fifty was regarded as well past the prime of life. He had ridden long distances, slept on occasion under cold, damp blankets, coped with panic-stricken refugees, commanded soldiers as untrained and inexperienced as himself, and marched them through a dangerous pass, not knowing at what moment they might fall into an ambush. But, being Franklin, he had relished lighter moments. He had listened with delight to instrumental music while visiting the Moravians at Bethlehem; he had satisfied his famous curiosity by timing two of his axmen while they felled a 14-inch pine—it

to ———, January 25 (stated in the printed Council Minutes to be addressed to Morris, but internal evidence makes this impossible), Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VII, 15-16; Franklin to Morris, January 26, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 325-326, in part only, with omission not indicated); Thomas Lloyd to ———, January 30 or 31, American Philosophical Society. Franklin's account in his autobiography is fairly detailed but it telescopes his December trip to Northampton County in company with Hamilton and Fox and his January expedition, after the Reading conference, back to that area as sole commander. Par. Text edit., 362-374. The authoritative discussion of the forts which Franklin erected is William A. Hunter, *Forts on the Pennsylvania Frontier, 1753-1758* (Harrisburg, 1960), 214-264.

took them just six minutes; and he had proudly served his officers' mess the cold roast beef and veal and good mince pies that his wife Deborah had managed to send up to him from Philadelphia.<sup>38</sup> Above all he had the satisfaction of performing a useful public service and of knowing that in a completely new field of endeavor he was acquitting himself both honorably and well.

Upon his return Franklin was elected colonel of the regiment of militia raised in Philadelphia under the terms of the act he himself had drafted. This was the only military title he ever received. Governor Morris was reluctant to give him his commission, recognizing and fearing his growing popularity, but just because of that popularity the governor could not refuse. When the colonel set out for Virginia in March on post-office business some twenty of his officers and thirty of his men appeared on horseback at his door and escorted him with clattering hoofs and drawn swords to the ferry landing.<sup>39</sup> The governor and his friends were not pleased at the demonstration.

During the next twelve months Franklin's services were again chiefly political. Some of the strictest Quakers withdrew from the Assembly and as the war went on that body became more willing to take measures for provincial defense. But the issue of taxation of proprietary estates continued, under both Governor Morris and his successor William Denny, acting under instructions from the Penns in England.

In January, 1757, Denny rejected a supply bill on this ground; thereupon the Assembly decided to send representatives to England to present their point of view to the home authorities. Franklin was chosen to go. But, perhaps through his influence and because of the critical military situation, the House agreed to adopt a new measure modeled on that of November, 1755, exempting the

<sup>38</sup> Franklin's letters to his wife during this absence of seven weeks contain many sidelights on his experiences. They include letters of the following dates, only the first three of which survive in manuscript form: December 27, 1755, American Philosophical Society (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 320-321); January 1, 1756, Yale University Library; January 15, American Philosophical Society (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 323); January 25, William Duane, ed., *The Works of Dr. Benjamin Franklin*, VI (Phila., 1817), 8-9 (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 324-325); January 30, Duane, *Works*, VI, 10 (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 326-327); January 31, Duane, *Works*, VI, 11 (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 327-328).

<sup>39</sup> Franklin to Peter Collinson, November 5, 1756, Pierpont Morgan Library (Smyth, *Writings*, III, 347-349); Par. Text edit., 374-378.

Penns' estates. The governor still found several features in it which violated his instructions, and another stalemate threatened. The new commander in chief, Lord Loudoun, arrived in Philadelphia while this discussion was going on and, after hearing the arguments of the governor and Council on the one hand and of Franklin as spokesman for the Assembly on the other, advised Denny to approve the bill and the governor gave way.<sup>40</sup> Soon afterwards Franklin left Philadelphia for England, ending his direct service in the defense of the province against the French and Indians.

From the first threat of danger on the frontier Franklin had been alert to the problem of colonial defense. As much as anyone in Pennsylvania he had understood the need for vigorous measures. Although politically allied to the Quakers, he never entertained the conscientious scruples against the use of arms that formed a cardinal tenet of their faith. But he did agree with their position on the political and constitutional issues of the day and felt that the rights of the representative Assembly, as he defined them, were too precious to be surrendered at the behest of the far-away proprietors and their resident governors, even in times of emergency. Concessions, he seems to have felt, should be made by both parties, not by the representatives alone. And since proprietary concessions were, for the most part, not forthcoming, he appeared at times to be oblivious to the critical situation developing on the frontier. This was, however, far from being the case. When opportunities arose to be of direct service in matters of defense no one was more vigorous or more active than he. Witness his part

<sup>40</sup> The conflicts in the Assembly are extensively documented in *Votes*, 1755-56 and 1756-57, and in *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VII, *passim*. The actions and messages on the supply bills in the early months of 1757 are recorded in *Votes*, 1756-57, 57-97; 102-103; *Pa. Col. Recs.*, VII, 441-443, 451-454; 1 *Pa. Arch.*, III, 117-118; Gertrude S. Kimball, ed., *Correspondence of William Pitt . . . with Colonial Governors and Military and Naval Commissioners in America* (N. Y., 1906), I, 41. Franklin's recollection of this episode in his autobiography is at variance with the facts as officially recorded. As he remembered it, Loudoun persuaded him—Franklin—to induce the Assembly to give way, not Denny. Par. Text edit., 392-394. Actually the House had made its concession on the proprietary estates several weeks before Loudoun arrived in Philadelphia and the governor gave in on other provisions of the bill only after receiving the general's written advice to waive his instructions "for the present." Carl Van Doren, following the autobiography rather than the official records, repeats most of Franklin's erroneous account. *Benjamin Franklin* (N. Y., 1938), 258-259.



in providing the essential transport for Braddock's army and in furnishing arms and ammunition to the inhabitants of exposed areas. Witness his driving through a reluctant legislature the first act Pennsylvania ever had for a legalized militia force. And witness, too, his active service on the frontier in rallying the frightened settlers, organizing their defenses, and building forts for their protection. That the services he performed in the defense of the province were appreciated and that the mass of the people understood his peculiar position is attested by the growth of his popularity during these years.

Writing to his mother a few years before the events which we have been considering, he had reviewed his situation and activities now that he had retired from active business as a printer. "So the Years roll round," he wrote, "and the last will come; when I would rather have it said, *He lived usefully*, than *He died rich*."<sup>41</sup> These years of his activity in defense of the province he loved so well demonstrate that he had fully learned the art of living usefully.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Abiah Franklin, April 12, 1750, Boston Athenaeum, Labaree *et al.*, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, III, 475.