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THE MILITARY OPENS THE GATEWAY TO THE WEST

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MR. McClintock, Senator Martin, Dr. Belfour, Trustees, Members and Friends of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania:

In planning the inauguration of your Bicentennial activities this evening, you gave an amateur a task for a professional.

Probably there are few in this distinguished audience who do not know as much about the military history of Western Pennsylvania as I. Certainly there are some whose knowledge of the history of this region is exceedingly extensive, and who are in fact authorities in this field. In addition to the officers of the Society, I would particularly mention Mr. Niles Anderson, who is, I think, in the audience. I am indebted to Mr. Anderson not only for the generous way in which he has shared the results of his research but also for the pleasure of listening to the absorbing manner in which he related them to me.

The longer I live, the more I use my dictionary. It has several interesting definitions of the word "history"—"a record of facts"; "a systematic written account of events"; "the branch of knowledge that records and explains past events."

An address delivered before the Historical Society on October 13, 1958, by General Matthew B. Ridgway, former Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Europe, and Army Chief of Staff; locally, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Mellon Institute and currently, Chairman of the Armed Forces Committee for the Bicentennial.—Ed.

It would be egregious effrontery for me to try to give you a record of facts. It would be extremely boring to give you a systematic account of events. But perhaps a very few facts may outline and to a certain extent explain past events. Perhaps they may even focus our thought and so illuminate, however slightly, the shadowy spaces around some of the great problems facing us. If so, then perhaps an amateur can stimulate your interest without unduly trespassing upon your wide historical knowledge.

Even this is no light task, and I approach it in a respectful and humble spirit. The "facts," as history would have us accept them, may be tricky. Events may be fixed accurately as to time and place—though even these are not infrequently in error—but the mere sequence of things done or not done, while it fills libraries, is of secondary importance. The information of prime importance is knowledge of the facts which led up to these events, the atmosphere, the influences which affected decisions, and which in turn produced events. Here again the best of researchers can never be sure of his ground, no matter how carefully he cultivates it.

To digress for one moment, I go back a mere eighty years to Custer's tragic end. There is probably no single major element in the countless stories written of that fight about which there are not strong views 180° apart. There were no human survivors on Custer's side, which of course is one of the main reasons. But by no means can that explain the failure of historians to agree on any of these major matters. Some of the other reasons we know. The Indian leaders who played a major part in the annihilation of Custer and his men were for some time reluctant to talk, fearing punishment and even possible execution. Much later some of them did talk, but by that time memories had dulled and were no longer dependable. Officers and men of other elements of Custer's Command with first-hand knowledge of many of the events leading up to the climax would not talk. Pride in the regiment and consideration for Mrs. Custer's feelings restrained them until they, too, were full of years and empty of memory. Jealousies, ambitions and strong personal dislikes also distorted the picture, that it will never be revealed in its true light.

Now I come back to my starting point—a few factual records which in the briefest manner outline military events in this region two centuries ago. They culminate in the occupation by General Forbes and his troops of the ground on which we stand tonight,

and in the "Opening, by the military, of the Gateway to the West."

In the mid-eighteenth century the British colonies on this continent were still but a narrow shelf along the Atlantic seaboard. Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia were even referred to as the "southern" colonies, although the Carolinas had by then a considerable population.

France, through its intrepid explorers, had sailed up the St. Lawrence, penetrated westward to the Missouri, and had gone down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans. French control was of course tenuous and intermittent. Between the tracks and trails these early explorers and traders followed and the Atlantic seaboard, there lay a vast belt of formidable mountains and almost unbroken forests. But already there were men of vision who clearly perceived the potentialities of this vast unexplored area, particularly among those prominent in the affairs of Pennsylvania and Virginia. They looked with acquisitive eyes to the rich lands of the Ohio Basin, and to the trade with its future inhabitants.

The journey of the young officer of Virginia militia, who in the interests of the Ohio Company was dispatched westward by Governor Dinwiddie in 1753 to convey a warning to the French that they were trespassing, was the beginning of a train of events, which, culminating in late November of 1758, provided the occasion our Bicentennial now seeks to commemorate.

Let me enumerate a few decisive events of that period. They partially explain certain past events. They do, I think, throw some light on present problems, whose solutions lie in the future.

Washington's winter journey to Lake Erie to deliver Virginia's demand that the French withdraw.

Washington's surprise of Jumonville resulting in the latter's death in a dawn attack the following year.

The Virginian's retreat to Great Meadows and his forced retirement from Fort Necessity under pressure of superior forces, but with his Command intact.

Braddock's epic tragedy.

Britain's answer—her decision to break French power in North America by attacks along the entire line of French forts from Newfoundland to Lake Erie and thence to the Forks of the Ohio.

And then the final event of this brief outline, the Forbes Campaign with its bitter wrangle over which route to follow, the re-

occupation of Fort Duquesne and the definitive breaking of French control from the Great Lakes to the Ohio.

In truth, the military had opened the Gateway to the West, opened it and kept it open, for the flood of people to flow freely through in the decades to follow.

One serious interruption there was—when the outraged original inhabitants rose under Pontiac in a last bloody but futile effort to destroy the invader and prevent his further encroachment on tribal lands west of the Alleghenies.

Bouquet, Forbes' intrepid lieutenant, settled that on the decisive field of Bushy Run, settled it in a manner to end forever the threat of significant Indian depredations from the Susquehanna to the Allegheny.

Now let's reflect a little on some aspects of these events, as records and the research of scholars reveal them to us.

Let's just take a few threads from the fabric of that story from the past and see what of interest, and perhaps even of lessons for the future, it can yield. Biography is a fertile field for the historian, so let's start with threads from the characters of the principal players in this drama—Washington, Braddock, Bouquet and Forbes.

Washington was twenty-one on his 1753 winter journey to the French. He was only twenty-two at Fort Necessity, and twenty-three at Braddock's secret burial. Brave, impetuous and ambitious, he was experienced in wilderness ways and frontier fighting as were few, if any other, Colonials. By age twenty-six his stature had so grown that he was a power for British commanders to reckon with and a provincial military leader they could not spare. Yet still he lacked the maturity capable of evaluating events in the broader picture. Forbes' time-consuming politico-military diplomacy in separating the French from their Indian allies was seen as an exasperating delay, rather than the vital contribution to success it proved to be. British victories in the north which severed French supply lines to Fort Duquesne were undervalued. He was bitterly critical of Forbes, his superior Commander, for reasons which history has since invalidated. Yet, maturity would come in later years, and with it patience, of which he would find so great a need in the eight long years of the Revolutionary period, when the parsimony of the Continental Congress, adversities in the field, and even disloyalty in his own Staff were to try his very soul.

But Providence in inscrutable ways was forging the towering

figure of the Father of Our Country. Right here in our own hills and valleys he was gaining the military experience which was to bring him, in God's good time, after seventeen intervening years of a planter's life, the Commander-in-Chiefship of the Continental Armies. Amazing, is it not, that after FORT PITT in 1758 until Boston in 1775 he was without further training?

Braddock, the Guardsman—brave to the point of recklessness, true to his high code and concepts, but a victim of his time, his caste and frontier warfare, with which last he had had wholly insufficient experience.

Bouquet, a professional soldier of Swiss birth, magnificent courage, great tenacity of purpose, indefatigable energy, unswerving loyalty to his Chief, and leadership of the highest order—to him and to his Chief we owe a very great debt.

And finally, Forbes — the Chief himself — of whom Bouquet wrote: "After God the success of this Expedition is entirely due to the General, who by bringing about the Treaty of Easton, had struck the blow which has knocked the French in the head, in temporizing wisely to expect the Effects of that Treaty, in securing all his posts, and giving nothing to chance; and not yielding to the urging instances for taking Braddock's Road, which would have been our destruction."

Forbes — painstaking, thorough in planning, persevering in execution, unswayed by rival provincial claims of Virginians and Pennsylvanians alike, broad of vision, tenacious of purpose, not too aggressive, but plagued with severe bodily infirmities which delayed some decisions and diluted others.

Years hence the argument as to which road would have been better—Braddock's Road or the Forbes Road—an argument which at times threatened to break up the expedition—will doubtless still continue. Even the Campaign's successful outcome left Washington unshaken in his conviction that the Braddock route would have been preferable. But, as Mr. Niles Anderson succinctly states: "The inescapable fact remains that Forbes, on a road of his own choice, accomplished his mission, and without even engaging the enemy. He did a soldier's job. Success is his defense, and a mighty good one on which to rest his case."

Standing silent now beyond the shadows, what satisfaction must be his! His Campaign—not for Virginia, not for Pennsylvania, not for any of the separate provinces, but as Prime Minister

Pitt foresaw and predicted, "for the safety and preservation of America"—his Campaign had ended in decisive success. The Gateway stood open, never again to close.

What helpful lessons are here in these military annals of two centuries ago in the backwoods of a savage frontier? What benefits can we gain from reflecting upon events punctuated with the screams of tortured captives, the butchering of women and children right where now we gather? I think there are some lessons and some benefits.

I'll ask a few questions, leaving the answers to you, ladies and gentlemen.

Did the British Government then have clear concepts from which broad objectives were formulated?

Did these objectives, and the concepts from which they sprang, range far into the future, or were they expedients, forced by pressures of the moment, demanding daily solutions to daily problems?

In the light of present possibilities of being drawn once more into war, do we have clear concepts of where we are going in this new and swiftly changing historical era, which in some of its fundamental aspects is without parallel in man's experience? And if so, have our concepts been translated into positive objectives consistent with our fundamental moral values, and with consideration for the relentless forces now operative?

Or, are we casually pursuing courses of action which, in spite of short-term successes, could well confront us, within ten, twenty, or fifty years, with problems dwarfing any we now face? Does the decent opinion of mankind still count heavily with us as in the days of our struggle for independence? Is the moral condemnation of the world, now a possible consequence of ill-considered action, recognized and appraised in all its transcendent potentialities?

These are broad questions. They are not purely hypothetical, but very practical. A study of history during my own lifetime reveals abundant evidence of too little advance thought of postwar objectives until war was upon us. The ominous echoes of "unconditional surrender" still reverberate.

Newsweek's issue of 6 October carried an arresting quotation from a great European statesman, Mr. Paul-Henri Spaak, now Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Here it is: "So long as the views, sometimes selfish, of a single power can frustrate the combined wisdom of the rest, it will be very diffi-

cult to insure that the best solutions win the day. . . . No one nation of the West, however glorious its past, however powerful it may be today, is capable unaided of solving its problems and therefore of saving itself. In Continental Europe the wisest have already understood this. . . . In the U. S. your youthful strength may yet blind you to the truth, but it will sooner or later be brought home to all. I only hope it will not be too late."

I do not presume to know the answers to the questions I have propounded, though I certainly have my opinions. Maybe we can't find the answers, but we must try, and keep on trying. We each have an inescapable individual responsibility if democracy, as we embrace it, is to flourish.

Finally, one lesson does stand out in stark simplicity. Brutality is still rampant in this world. It is the same brutality, but on a far vaster scale than that practiced in the forests of this region in the period about which we have been talking. The blankets of luxury and self-indulgence are pleasant and continue to warm us in this sheltered land. But the stubborn bravery of the men and the enduring courage of the women who trudged into this region and settled it, and then moved on to push the tide of civilization and the torch of freedom westward to the Pacific, had need of sterner covering. And so tomorrow's problems may yet again demand of us the same spiritual stamina, the same physical fitness required to survive in those earlier days, the same willingness to sacrifice, if this "Gateway to the Future," which is now no longer Pittsburgh, but America, is to remain open to the passage of free people.

Cynics, and they are always numerous, may charge we are comparing the days of the frontier musket with those of the H-bomb. Yes, I would say we are, and well we should. I would say we are comparing the days of thoughtlessly embarking on military adventures—a favored pastime in other eras when the consequences were unlikely to range much farther than the musket ball of the woodsman—with military adventures today, the consequences of which would have no parallel in earth's history.

The potentials for destruction which presently exist can obliterate in hours more people than lived in the whole of Europe and the American colonies in 1758.

It seems to me every one of us should cogitate these matters, reach his own conclusions, and then express his conclusions, in ways deemed most appropriate. That is in the spirit of democracy. That

is in the spirit in which we have chosen, as a people, to keep the "Gateway to Our Future" open.

And finally, let's keep this in mind: "The rulers of more than one-third of the world's population with huge and increasing military power, have declared themselves our implacable enemies, and have shown that they will not flinch from military action whenever and wherever it promises to be profitable and reasonably safe."* It is because of this that "The United States faces a peacetime security problem more demanding of thought, treasure, and toughness than ever before."*

It was the military that opened the Gateway. If the gauntlet is again flung in our face, it will be the military, directed by a united, God-fearing and determined people, that will keep it open.

* Quoted from *The Defense We Can Afford*, by James F. Brownlee, Chairman, Committee for Economic Development, Subcommittee on Economic Policies for National Security—1958.