

Battle of Vincennes Reading Comprehension

Name _____

A British Fort Far from the Center of Fighting

Fort Vincennes was a British fort located on what now is the border of Indiana and Illinois, along the Wabash River. At the time, it was in what was called the Northwest Territory, far from most of the fighting in the Revolutionary War. The English had initially built in during the French and Indian War. The fort was square in shape and defended on several sides by blockhouses: towers made of thick timbers and musket-proof, equipped with a cannon. In early 1779, a new lieutenant governor named Henry Hamilton came to the region. Hamilton decided to reinforce the fort with new defenses, making it even more impenetrable.

George Rogers Clark and the Miserable March to Vincennes

The Americans knew they needed to strike the fort before the reinforcements were completed and the site became even harder to conquer. The man chosen for the job was Lieutenant Colonel George Rogers Clark, who was stationed 180 miles west of Fort Vincennes in Kaskaskia. Clark left Kaskaskia on February 6, 1779, with 172 American and French soldiers. The trip to Vincennes was very challenging during the winter, as the wet conditions forced the soldiers to wade through cold standing water and drained much of their food. The group reached the town of Vincennes on February 23. Many of the townspeople were American sympathizers who kept the invasion quiet so that Clark and his men could take the British by surprise.

Surprise Attack

The day of the attack, Hamilton didn't realize that the Americans had arrived until he heard them firing on the fort. Clark had organized a barricade facing the fort, keeping the British in. Clark's strategy proved effective, and the morning of February 24, he demanded that the British surrender. Hamilton refused, but agreed to meet Clark and discuss terms, knowing that he was in a bad spot. The morning of February 25, the British surrendered Fort Vincennes, and the Americans renamed it Fort Patrick Henry.

Legacy of the Battle

The Battle of Vincennes was an American victory, but is also infamous for another encounter that occurred at the same time. During the fight, a war party of native Americans and French-Canadians entered Vincennes, ignorant to the presence of American soldiers. In the fight that followed, Clark captured some of the group; while he let the French-Canadians go, he brutally killed the Native Americans and threw their bodies in the river as revenge for native raids in the frontier area. Clark never denied or apologized for his cruel actions in Vincennes.

- 1. Why did the Americans decide to attack Fort Vincennes?**
 - a. Because it was the British's weakest link.
 - b. They wanted to strike before renovations made the fort even stronger.
 - c. George Rogers Clark was eager to prove himself in battle at Vincennes.
 - d. They thought that the new lieutenant governor was untested and could be defeated.

- 2. Which statement about the town of Vincennes is true?**
 - a. It was fairly warm in the winter months.
 - b. It was the site of an American victory and human cruelty.
 - c. Its tall blockhouses kept its fort from being conquered and invaded.
 - d. Its name was changed to the town of Patrick Henry.

- 3. Which statement about George Rogers Clark is true?**
 - a. He was located over 200 miles from Vincennes.
 - b. He did not initially want to fight in the Battle of Vincennes.
 - c. He killed Native Americans at Vincennes.
 - d. His poor leadership lost the fight at Vincennes.

- 4. Which event happened first?**
 - a. Clark leaves Kaskaskia with 172 men.
 - b. Hamilton surrenders at Vincennes.
 - c. Hamilton begins renovating Fort Vincennes.
 - d. The townspeople of Vincennes keep the invasion quiet.

- 5. Which of the following is not an advantage provided by the blockhouses?**
 - a. They were gun-proof.
 - b. They had cannons to fend off invaders.
 - c. They were made of strong metal.
 - d. They were tall towers providing the advantage of height.

- 6. Why didn't Hamilton see the attack coming until he heard the Americans firing on Fort Vincennes?**
 - a. Because he was an unfit commander and was not paying attention.
 - b. Because Clark invaded under the cover of night.
 - c. Because he was busy renovating Fort Vincennes.
 - d. Because the Vincennes townspeople kept the Americans' secret.

- 7. Which statement about Fort Vincennes is true?**
 - a. It was far away from most of the military action of the war.
 - b. It was renamed for Colonel George Rogers Clark.
 - c. It was taken over by the French-Canadians after the battle.
 - d. It was never altered from its original form.

Answers:

1. B

2. B

3. C

4. C

5. C

6. D

7. A