

French & Indian War Foundation

"Preserving and Interpreting the Colonial History of Virginia's Frontier"

PO Box 751, Winchester, Virginia 22604

www.FIWF.org

Volume 15, Issue 4, Fall 2020

Washington, Gist & Half King Start A World War

By Carl Ekberg

Most scholars agree that l’Affaire Jumonville was a defining life experience for the young George Washington. The charming sound of bullets whistling (Washington’s own words in a letter to his brother Jack.) through the early morning May air trumped Washington’s impotent disgust, as he helplessly observed his Indian allies butcher a dozen wounded Frenchmen, including Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville. Washington’s destiny was sealed—he would make his mark in the world as a soldier, a leader of men in the tumult of battle.

A question that persistently arises when discussing the Jumonville Affair is who in fact fired the first shot that early, misty morning of May 27, 1754, which in the words of the English statesman Horace Walpole “set the world on fire,” igniting the Seven Years’ War (French and Indian War)? The distinguished military historian, David Preston, argues in a recent article (“When Young George Washington Started a War,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 2019) that Washington himself fired the first shot, and that that fact “heightens Washington’s moral responsibility in the whole affair.” Not an intensely introspective man, Washington never overtly revealed how he grappled with the various moral issues that suffused this affair.

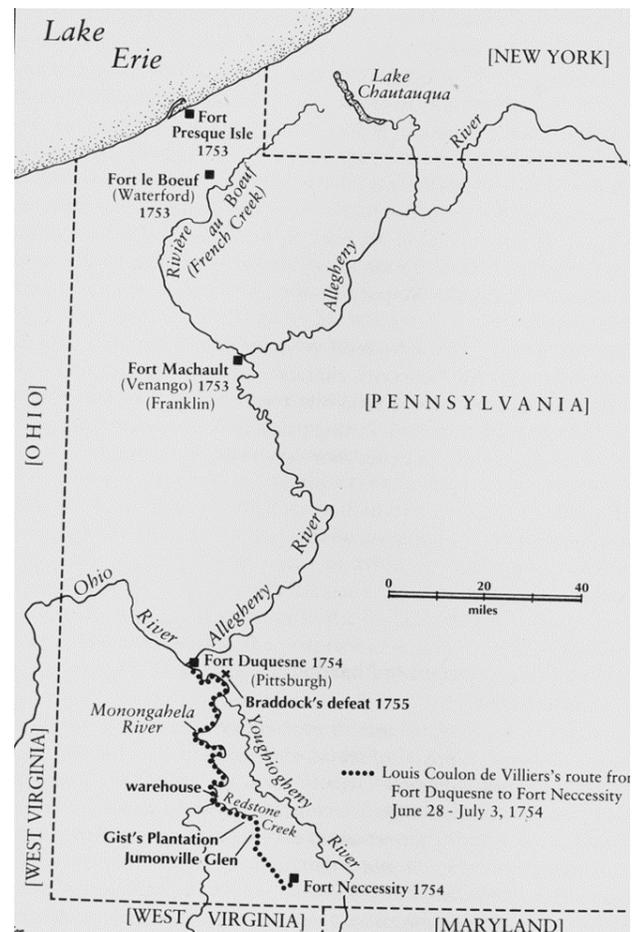
A second question regarding young Washington’s actions in the spring of 1754 is why he impulsively ordered a frantic night march, in the rain, to attack Jumonville’s encampment? Part of the answer to this question lies in Washington own psyche—he wanted eagerly to engage in military action in the furtherance of his career.

But two other persons also played leading roles in pushing the Virginians to take immediate offensive action against a party of Frenchmen, even though Britain and France were not at war. The first of these men was Christopher Gist, a deeply experienced frontiersman, whose establishment was located west of the Eastern continental divide (that is, within the drainscape of the Ohio River), in French-claimed territory, just north of present-day Uniontown. When young Washington began his perilous winter (November 1753-January 1754) expedition to the French forts (Venango and Le Boeuf) in northwestern Pennsylvania, he recruited Gist at Will’s Creek (Cumberland) to serve as his guide. And the second was Tanaghrisson (Half King), an Iroquois leader who had been humiliated when, in mid-April 1754, the French had seized (without bloodshed) and dismantled the Ohio Company’s trading post near the Forks of the Ohio (now Pittsburgh). Half King and his followers had helped to build the British stronghold under the direction of Captain William Trent, and when French forces destroyed it Half King responded by becoming violently anti-French and pro-British.

In Governor Robert Dinwiddie’s instructions (Oct. 31, 1753) to Washington for this expedition, the governor advised him “On Your Arrival at the Logstown, You are to address Yourself to the Half King. . . .” Once Washington arrived at Logstown (on the Ohio River just downstream from present-day Pittsburgh), he persuaded Half King to accompany him and Gist on the remainder of their journey to the French forts in northwestern Pennsylvania. The perils that the three men encountered and overcame on this historic expedition created a certain bond between them. Washington came to depend on Gist and Half King, to trust their judgment in difficult circumstances, even though Washington never evinced much sympathy or affection for any Indian—either friend or foe.

May of 1754 brought these three men back together in what were indeed difficult circumstances, at Great Meadows in southern Pennsylvania. Washington had begun his expedition toward Virginia’s northwestern frontier with

Continued on page 3



Map of the Ohio country showing locations of events described in this article.

We hope that this issue finds everyone continuing to be well and persevering through the unfortunate circumstances brought on by the coronavirus epidemic. In keeping with guidance from the Governor's office for social distancing, and with cooperation from the weather, the Board has been able to meet in-person in July and August by holding meetings outside after having to meet informally by teleconference from April through June.

The circumstance of the coronavirus epidemic made the Board aware of a need to address a means by which technology could be used to conduct business remotely when in-person meetings would be impractical or unsafe for whatever reason. To this end the Board used our informal teleconference meetings to work as a committee-of-the-whole to create a framework within the by-laws to allow meetings by teleconference. As a result of these efforts, in July the Board approved revisions to the by-laws that establish a mechanism to permit holding formal meetings and conducting business by teleconference in the future should circumstances necessitate. Note that the expectation is for the Board to hold meetings in-person unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

Since the lock-down of Virginia per the Governor's orders in March, the Foundation has not held or taken part in our usual history events, the most notable deferral being Fort Loudoun Day. That has not kept some of our members from participating in events elsewhere, for example see the article by Eric Robinson in this newsletter.

Committee work continues, albeit at a slower pace than would normally be the case. As the work of these committees comes to fruition we will be reporting on the results of their efforts. We continue to have our fingers crossed that, as Fall progresses, we will be able to return to participating in events postponed earlier as well as those scheduled for later in the year. Events in which the Foundation will be participating will be posted on the website calendar as their time nears.

Keep well and enjoy the Fall as best you are able.

Phoenix Rising

By Daniel Eric Robinson

This Fort Loudoun located near Mercersburg, Pa., is one of the three forts built along the frontier during the French & Indian War conflict that share the same name. Built to help control Indian raids along the western frontier, this fort saw its share of action. McDowell's Fort which was located nearby was deemed inadequate by the British. Captain Jack Armstrong and his troops constructed this new fortification in 1756. This plain looking palisade fort served a supply depot, rest area, staging point for the Forbes campaign in 1758 along with the Bouquet's campaigns in 1763 and 1764. Fort Loudoun was also the host of a large Indian council. Despite all this action, it was perhaps the year 1765 that brought the biggest claim to fame for the fort. It was in that year that James Smith led hundreds of locals in an armed conflict with the British troops stationed at the fort. Books have been written about that important event, yet I must sum up actions in a few lines.



Upset about the traders who passed through the area on their way westward to possibly sell arms, gunpowder and other dangerous items to the Indians, Smith decided to take action. He trained and led locals, in confronting some traders and the British garrison. The action was called the Black Boy rebellion largely due to the fact that the locals darkening their faces to avoid recognition. Most of the action occurred during the spring, summer and fall of 1765 and included the Black Boys laying siege to and firing bullets at the British Highlanders garrisoning Fort Loudoun. Several armed conflicts also occurred outside the fort, but in the vicinity. In the end, the garrison evacuated the fort. This pre-Rev War conflict was brought to life in the movie *Allegheny Uprising* which starred John Wayne. The exciting life of James Smith had more chapters to be written, but that is for another story ("Fort").

Visitors to the event got to partake of colonial breads fresh from the forts clay baking oven, observe the firing of the swivel cannon, pet a horse, learn about colonial life and cooking. Artisans demonstrated ribbon weaving, wood spoon making, historical sketching and the working of oxen horns. Andrew Newman, Mike Strausner, Mark Heckman and the welcoming local units ran an outstanding event. The public seemed to be enthralled with the accurate portrayals along with the progress made on the fort. Military units represented at the encampment included the 2nd Company of the Virginia Regiment under Colonial Adam Stephen (Troy Heck), the Scottish Highlanders of the 42nd Regiment under Gary Smith and Pennsylvanian Provincials commanded by Lynn Otto. One of the forts generous donors, Dennis Kubicki, looking sharp in his green PA Provincial uniform guarded the gate.

We were enriched by troops traveling from the Conococheague Institute which is another outstanding site. The large crew of reenactors of all ages came from as far as western edge of the state. I made a point of circulating among the camps, sharing and listening. From those travels came a deep appreciation for these dedicated historians, many who have been giving up weekends for years, in an effort to keep history alive. Lastly, I would like to tip my hat to the children that participated in colonial attire. I witnessed a charming young lady kneading bread, and later serving that bread along with cooking eggs for others. History will be safe and thrive in her caring hands.

out of the Ohio River drainscape, which was French-claimed territory. This shocking news contained only a kernel of truth: Yes, a small French party (some 35 odd men), lead (commanded is too strong a word) by Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville, was indeed heading eastward from Fort Duquesne. But this was not an offensive military force with ambitions to draw English blood, for their royal majesties, orders to roust any Frenchmen from the Forks of the Ohio and establish a solid British presence there. En route, on April 20, Washington received news that the French had struck first. Descending from Lake Erie via the Alleghany River, hundreds of Frenchmen were erecting a major fort (Duquesne) at the Forks. Washington, most always a cautious and prudent commander, decided for the time being to dig in and build a fort (soon named Fort Necessity) at Great Meadows, while awaiting news from the west. The news was not good. The French commandant at Duquesne, Claude-Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur, was receiving steady reinforcements from Canada and making good progress on his fort, ultimately the most impressive fortification ever erected in the Ohio River valley.

Then, suddenly, the news and rumors coming into Washington's camp at Great Meadows got worse, much worse. Contrecoeur, confident (even arrogant because he was, after all, an aristocratic Frenchman) in his position at the Forks, was sending an expeditionary force eastward, the intention of which was to drive the British back eastward across the Alleghanies, push them entirely Louis XV and George II, were at peace; rather, unbeknownst to Washington, Jumonville was on a diplomatic mission. In May 1754, that was the situation confronting Washington in his camp at Great Meadows, which, like Gist's plantation lay west of the Alleghanies, in territory the French deemed to be theirs.

In April, Half King, having been insulted by the French, addressed a formal speech to the governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia in which he proclaimed that "We are ready to attack them [the French], and are waiting only for your aid." Half King was motivated by personal grievances, but on Virginia's remote western frontier in 1754 personal issues could have sweeping international ramifications. On May 24, Washington received a letter from Half King in which the Indian exhorted that "the French army is going to meet Mr. George Washington. . . be on your guard against them, for they are resolved to strike the first English they meet." Half King's letter was inflammatory and wildly inaccurate—Jumonville's small diplomatic party was hardly an army, and he had no intention of "striking" anyone—but Half King's words surely aroused anxiety in Washington's breast, which of course was precisely what the Iroquois Indian had in mind.

But it wasn't only Half King who wanted to goad Washington into military action. On May 27, Washington recorded in his journal that "Mr. Gist arrived early in the morning with news that M. La Force with 50 men, . . . had gone to his plantation the day before about noon, and that they would have killed a cow and broken everything in his house if they had not been prevented by two Indians, whom he had left to guard his house."¹ Everything in this journal entry is either weird or wrong: The French party in the area had never amounted to 50 men, 35 is closer to the count, and they were not lead by La Force, but rather by Jumonville; French intended actions could hardly be divined when Jumonville's party laid not a hand on anything at Gist's plantation; finally, if 35 Frenchmen had really intended on wreaking havoc at Gist's place how could two Indians employed by Gist have prevented it? Gist, for purely personal reasons (His plantation was located on French-claimed land.) improvised this story because he wanted, as did Half King, to persuade Washington to take offensive action against the French. Gist looked forward to a military showdown, which when Washington prevailed would protect Gist's property. That longed-for protection did eventually arrive—but only after years of bloody frontier warfare.

King George II himself had sanctioned a westwardly expansionary policy when he approved the land grant to Ohio Company of Virginia in 1749. And Governor Robert Dinwiddie consistently urged Washington to be assertive, even aggressive, in defending Great Britain's rights and claims on the western frontier. Washington himself assuredly wanted to promote his career by demonstrating his military prowess. In that tense, chaotic spring of 1754, Washington, Gist and Half King seem to have been mutually goading one another down the path to an armed confrontation with the French. Nevertheless, the question arises whether Washington's unprovoked attack on Jumonville's party would ever have occurred without the urging of Half King and Christopher Gist, each of whom had a personal interest in promoting Washington's attack on Jumonville's party, whose men were just rubbing the sleep out of their eyes when the Virginians fired their first volley.

Postscript

After the massacre, Jumonville's papers were retrieved, which demonstrated beyond any doubt that Jumonville's mission had been one of diplomacy, not warfare, and that Contrecoeur, commandant at Fort Duquesne, had had no intention of provoking an explosive international incident by drawing English blood. Washington, under whose command the massacre had been affected, understandably did not relish facing these hard facts. Curiously, after the bloodshed was over and the unburied, scalped French corpses littered their campsite,² Washington, perhaps uneasy about what he had wrought, solicited Half King's opinion about what the French intentions had really been. Half King cleverly helped to ease Washington's mind by assuring him that the diplomatic summons discovered in Jumonville's papers "was a mere pretext; they [i.e. the French] had never pretended to come to us as anything other than enemies." Washington's hopes about promoting his career came wonderfully to fruition, for the massacre met with the unalloyed approval of Governor Dinwiddie. On June 1, he wrote to Washington from Winchester, which was the governor's vantage point for observing the action to the northwest, in the high Alleghany Mountains: I have received "the very agreeable Acct of Yr Killing & taking Monsr Le Force [i.e. Jumonville] & his whole Party of 35 Men on which Success I heartily congratulate You." It's so much fun to kill Frenchmen!

¹It must be noted that Washington's "Journal" for the events in the spring of 1754 is a translation (into English) from a translation (into French), both originating from Louis Coulon de Villiers confiscated Washington's original ms. at Fort Necessity in early July 1754

²When Jumonville's brother, Louis Coulon de Villiers, came upon the site of the massacre on July 3, 1754, he noted in his journal: "I stopped at the place where my brother was murdered, and there were still corpses there."

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The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization

Mission

“The French and Indian War Foundation preserves and interprets the colonial history of the Virginia frontier.”

Goals

- Raise public awareness about the war and its consequences through public lectures and tours, as well as publication in the media.
- Collect and conserve primary documents relating to the war.
- Identify, document, preserve and interpret French and Indian War era landmarks in the backcountry of the mid-Atlantic colonies.
- Cooperate with privately and publicly owned French and Indian War fort sites in research, promotion and preservation activities.

We encourage high school and college History students to participate with all activities.

- I will volunteer my services
- I would like to make a Donation _____

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The French and Indian War Foundation

**P.O. Box 751
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Call for Committee Members!
 If you have ideas, time or resources we need your help. If you could serve on any of the above committees, please email fiwf.dsg@comcast.net.

The Board of Directors meets at 1:30 p.m. on the 1st Thursday of the month at 419 N. Loudoun St. Members are welcome, however, space is limited.

Meet Board Member Tony Elar: 50 Years of Re-Enacting!

by Tony Elar

Board Member Tony Elar celebrated his 50th year of Re-Enacting in 2019. First joining the 64th Regiment of Foot in 1969 Tony has re-enacted The Revolutionary War, the Civil War as well as WW1 and WW2.

A graduate of Gettysburg College with a BA in Political Science, Tony entered the printing industry after College graduation in 1975. During the 1976 Bi-Centennial Tony recreated DeLanceys Brigade of Loyalists in the New York area. While at College he re-enacted Civil War and joined the famed Iron Brigade of the Union Army. In the 80's Tony became involved with Direct Marketing and enjoyed a successful career on Madison and Park Ave in NY. Born in Freeport, NY, he has lived in New York City, Tarrytown, NY and moved to Virginia in the mid-90's venturing west to the Shenandoah Valley. He now resides on a 46 acre farm in the Harmony Hollow area near Front Royal raising Black Angus calves. Tony also owns Yellow Cab of the Shenandoah, LLC as well as Infosystems Direct, LLC.

Tony is married to his wife Kathleen, a retired RN. Tony's son Tony III is now a Junior at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania and is also majoring in Political Science. Tony became involved with the French and Indian War Foundation in 2014. With Jim Moyer and his son Tony, they re-created Captain George Mercer's Company of the Virginia Regiment which was garrisoned at The Fort Loudoun site in Winchester Va. Tony is currently the Development Chair of the Foundation and welcomes and thanks all members for their continued financial support!



SAVE THE DATE: ANNUAL MEETING

Awards to be Presented

Fort Loudoun Award:

recognizes leadership in promoting the colonial history of the Virginia frontier

Judge Robert Woltz History Award:

recognizes scholarship which furthers understanding of the French & Indian War era

Certificate of Appreciation:

recognizes non-members for outstanding service to the foundation

November 15, 2020

The George Washington Hotel
103 East Piccadilly Street
Winchester, VA

2 pm to 4 pm

The following individuals are eligible for election to new 3-year terms for the board of directors:

Dale Corey, David Jenkins and Stevan Resan

This event will be held in accordance with the Governor's requirements for adhering to COVID-19 precautions in place at the time. All attendees will be expected to adhere to these guidelines.

*"Preserving and Interpreting the
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