

A HIGH WIND RISING: GEORGE
WASHINGTON, FORT NECESSITY, AND THE
OHIO COUNTRY INDIANS

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Finding a large stone situated along a gushing spring, Christopher Gist took out a cold chisel and set to work. A stalwart adventurer and pioneer from Maryland, Gist stood deep in the trans-Appalachian wilderness known as the Ohio Country. He had come to the region as an agent for the Ohio Company, a group of wealthy Virginia speculators determined to develop the land for potential settlers. For nearly eight months, beginning in July 1751, he had roamed the frontier carefully scouting the region to locate good soil, timber, and water. Despite this challenging assignment, Gist chose to take the time to chisel away at the massive rock. When he finished, he stepped back to admire the inscription which read, "The Ohio Company—Feby 1751—Christopher Gist."¹ For Gist, the inscription was more than an idle gesture carved deep in the backwoods—it was a bold and iron-clad claim to all of the Ohio Country. The letters cut in stone served as a counter measure to the French, who had three years earlier come to the region and made their own claim to the territory by burying lead plates inscribed

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with the fleur-de-lis. Remarkably, neither the French nor the Virginians gave much consideration to the people who actually resided on the land—the Ohio Country Indians.²

The actions of both Gist and the French would soon turn the Indians' sanctuary into a bloody battlefield, and before it was finished, the entire world would be engulfed in a conflagration of epic proportions known as the Seven Years' War. In order to understand the origins of this conflict as it pertains to North America, it is necessary to examine the profound role played by those native inhabitants of the Ohio Country. Until quite recently, historians examining this crucial period of early American history, tended to regard the Indians as mere pawns in the larger European struggle. For these early scholars, the Indians appeared childlike and primitive, lacking the sophistication to develop and act upon their own agendas. Recently, however, we have come to a far better understanding and appreciation of the complex and intricate nature of Native American diplomacy, trade, and warfare.³ In fact, it now seems quite evident that the French and British did not exploit the Indians in the early stages of this historic conflict. Instead, it was the indigenous people of the Upper Ohio River Valley who sought to manipulate both European protagonists in a valiant attempt to preserve their homeland. Their strategy would eventually help ignite the war and draw a young Virginia provincial officer named George Washington into a fateful encounter at a place called the Great Meadows.

Many of the Indian nations that occupied the Appalachian Plateau were refugees who had been displaced by earlier European settlement along the Atlantic seaboard. These people included the Delawares who once resided in the broad river valley that bears their name. The Shawnees, a tribe that other Indians often referred to as wanderers, also found sanctuary in the region; as did small enclaves of Mahicans, Tuscaroras, and Wyandots. There were also representatives from each of the Five Nations Iroquois who emigrated from New York to make their homes along many of the rivers and streams that coursed through the area. By moving to the Ohio River Valley, these Iroquois became separated from the traditional political and social ties that bound them to their New York kinsmen. As a result, many embraced a new regional identity, distinct from the Iroquois Confederation to the north. To the English, these people were indistinguishably known as Mingo— a corruption of the Delaware word *Mengwe*, meaning "stealthy," which was applied to all the Iroquois of the Ohio Country.⁴

As more and more Indians entered the Ohio River Valley, they became increasingly interactive, sharing land, resources, experiences, and political agendas. Before long, multi-cultural communities sprang up along the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers and their tributaries. In 1748, Pennsylvania's Indian agent, Conrad Weiser, visited the important trading village of Loggstown, located upon the upper Ohio River. Here he met with the leaders of ten different Indian nations, representing a total of 789 warriors. Weiser noted that the Indians identified themselves as "all one People," and that the Iroquois leaders present at the council claimed to speak "in behalf of all the Indians on Ohio."⁵ This meeting with the Indians of Loggstown made it clear that a new council fire had been ignited in the Ohio Country. No longer did these people feel bound by traditional political affiliations with their kinsmen to the north or east. They had forged a new collective identity that, in their minds, gave them the right to assert their independence from the hegemony of the Iroquois Confederation in New York.

This new sense of assertiveness on the part of the Ohio Indians came at a timely juncture in early American history. During the conflict known as King George's War, fought between 1744 and 1748, provincial authorities in Pennsylvania attempted to enlist the support of the Iroquois Confederation in eliminating French presence in the west. When the council fire in New York proclaimed neutrality in the war, Pennsylvania's secretary, Richard Peters, decided to bypass the Iroquois Confederation and appeal directly to the tribes who actually lived in the Upper Ohio River Valley. This represented a serious breach of protocol, since the Delawares and Shawnees had, since 1736, accepted or acquiesced to Iroquois leadership and authority when it came to dealings with the Pennsylvanians.⁶

By the time of Weiser's visit in 1748, one thing was certain, the various Indian nations residing in the upper Ohio River Valley preferred to conduct their own diplomatic affairs and a Seneca leader known as Tanaghrisson served as their principle spokesman. Recognizing his position of authority, the English referred to him as the Half King. For years, scholars have assumed that Tanaghrisson's authority emanated from the Iroquois Confederacy in New York, and that the sachems from the Onondaga Council, as it was known, had dispatched the Seneca to serve as a regent or viceroy over the Indians living along the Ohio River and its tributaries.⁷ Since events would prove that Tanaghrisson did not always act upon the will of the New York Iroquois, it is likely that his leadership position was supported by the Ohio Indians themselves. They envisioned themselves being eventually consumed in a vise

between expanding French and English aims in their Ohio Country sanctuary and decided to adopt the same diplomatic model that the Iroquois in New York had been using for years against these two European rivals. This well-known strategy called for the Indians to keep both the English and the French at arm's length by promoting diplomatic and trade relations with both. For this initiative to work in the Upper Ohio region, Iroquois leadership was needed due to the fact that the Five Nations already had formed a "Covenant Chain" relationship with the British and strong ties with the French.⁸

Tanaghrisson worked in close conjunction with another prominent Indian leader named Monacatootha, an Oneida who was known among the Shawnees as Scarouady. An imposing figure, Monacatootha boasted of participating in thirty battles where he personally killed seven men and took eleven captives. He bore a hatchet symbol on his chest and had bows and arrows tattooed on each side of his face. While the Half King remained in the Ohio Country to receive British and French emissaries, Monacatootha served as an envoy traveling to provincial capitals to meet with colonial leaders. In the fall of 1748 he arrived in Philadelphia with a delegation of chiefs to confer with Richard Peters regarding the proposed alliance against the French. During the conference, the Oneida leader informed Peters that the Ohio Indians were no longer bound by the dictates of the New York Iroquois. He said, "The old men at the Fire at Onondaga are unwilling to come into the War so the Young Indians, the Warriors, and Captains consulted together and resolved to take up the Hatchet against the will of their old People, and to lay their old People aside as of no use but in time of Peace." The Indians asked for powder, lead, and other material support to confront the French to the west and a delighted Peters loaded them down with presents to take back to their villages.⁹

Despite Monacatootha's overtures, the Ohio Indians would have to bide their time in asserting their full independence from the Iroquois, since the conflict known as King George's War came to an end in 1748. Nonetheless, both England and France continued to maintain a covetous eye upon the Upper Ohio River Valley. The following year, a French military expedition, under the command of Pierre-Joseph Céloron de Blainville, entered the region in an attempt to counteract the growing influence of English traders. Canadian officials recognized that English penetration into the area threatened to sever crucial navigation routes throughout their far-flung empire in North America. Céloron assumed a brusque and haughty manner toward the first Indians he encountered along the Allegheny River, telling them, "I will not

suffer the English on my land; and I invite you, if you are my true children, to not receive them any more in your villages." For their part, the Indians must have been truly mystified by these bold assertions for they always considered the land to be theirs, belonging neither to the British or the French. Their response to Céloron was, however, polite yet evasive. "We are not a party capable of deciding entirely of the general sentiments of the Five Nations who inhabit this river," the Indians informed the French commander, "we wait for the decision of the chiefs of our villages lower down."¹⁰ Their remarks suggest that these Indians were deferring to the leadership of Tanaghrisson who resided further down the Ohio.

As the French boats approached Loggstown, Céloron was surprised to see floating above the village "three French and one English flag." Upon landing, the French commander convened a council where he implored the Indians to cast out the British traders. It is quite possible that Tanaghrisson intentionally stayed away from the council, for the assembled Indians replied to Céloron, saying, "Those you behold here are only young men who keep their [the chief's] pipes; When our chiefs and our braves return, we shall intimate to them your intentions."¹¹ The evasiveness of the Indians convinced Céloron that the only way the French could maintain control over the Ohio Country was through military force.

While the Ohio people struggled to keep the French at arm's length to the north, the Virginians began to press them from the south. In 1750 Christopher Gist entered the area scouting locations to build a fort and settlement for the Ohio Company. At one point during his excursions into the wilderness, Gist encountered an exasperated Delaware Indian who, "desired to know where the Indians Land Lay, for that the French claimed all the Land on one side [of] the River Ohio & the English on the other Side." Gist recorded in his journal, "I was at a loss to answer him."¹²

In 1752 Gist arrived at Loggstown bringing with him commissioners from Virginia who were intent upon gaining a concession from the Indians to build a settlement in the Ohio Country. The Virginians were armed with a treaty signed by the New York Iroquois at Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1744 granting the British exclusive right to settle the area. When the formal conference got under way, the commissioners displayed a copy of the Lancaster document to Tanaghrisson and pointed out that the Onondaga Council recognized "the King's Right to all Lands that are, or shall be, by his Majesty's Appointment in the Colony of Virginia."¹³ For his part, Tanaghrisson was quick to realize that no Iroquois leader would have ever considered the Ohio Country to be part of

Virginia. The following day, he responded to the commissioners in a clever fashion, saying, "we assure you we are willing to confirm any Thing our Council has done in Regard to the Land, but we never understood, before you told us Yesterday, that the Lands then sold were to extend further to the Sun setting than the Hill on the other Side of the Allegheny Hill, so that we can't give you a further Answer now."¹⁴ This response served the Half King's interests in several ways. First of all, it allowed him to remain evasive in confirming the spurious Lancaster deed. Therefore, the actual boundary was still in dispute and open to interpretation. In addition, by deferring the ultimate confirmation of the deed to the Onondaga Council, Tanaghrisson could still maintain credibility as a leader among the Delawares, Shawnees, and other Ohio tribes.

Despite this diplomatic coup, the Half King also understood that he desperately needed to maintain a warm relationship with the British. Fed up with the Indians's refusal to oust British traders from the region, the French were threatening armed retaliation. Knowing the devastation that the French could bring, the Ohio Indians were in need of allies to counteract this threat. Therefore, Tanaghrisson proposed that "our Brethren of Virginia may build a strong House, at the Fork of the Mohongalio [the Forks of the Ohio], to keep such Goods, Powder, Lead & necessities as shall be wanting." The Half King reasoned that an English fort in the heart of the Ohio Country was precisely the type of bulwark that would temper French designs in the region.¹⁵

The Half King's fear of French aggression was confirmed the following spring when a force of nearly two thousand French soldiers entered the area from Canada and began to build a chain of forts to protect their water route along the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers. The invaders constructed the first of these outposts along the southern shore of Lake Erie and named it Fort Presque Isle (present-day Erie, Pennsylvania).

Word of this French invasion reached Loggstown in May where the British fur trader, William Trent, promised Tanaghrisson that the Virginians would supply the Indians with arms and ammunition to defend themselves. More alarming news arrived two months later when an Indian from the north informed the Half King that the French were preparing to proceed down the Allegheny and expel any English traders found in the vicinity. If the traders refused to depart in peace the French intended to "catch them by the Hair & beat them, & throw them over the Hill." Perhaps more disturbing was the intelligence that local Delawares, living along the upper Allegheny River, were cooperating with the French by providing them with pack horses, serving as porters to transport cargo, and hunting.¹⁶ The Delawares were motivated to

assist the French for a variety of reasons. They were, no doubt, impressed by the size of the invasion force. The previous year a mixed force of French and Indians, led by the French partisan Charles Langlade, had destroyed the Piankashaw village at Pickawillany, located along the Miami River, in retaliation for the tribe's close association with the British traders.¹⁷ Certainly, these Delawares feared that any resistance to the French might result in a similar reprisal. In addition, the invaders had expelled the English traders and the Indians would have to cooperate with the French or suffer shortages in important trade goods.

Realizing that the French military presence would eventually lead to an escalation of tension in the region, the Half King decided to adopt a policy that would keep both European powers out of the area. After dispatching Monacatootha on a diplomatic initiative to enjoin the Pennsylvanians and Virginians from entering the Ohio Country, Tanaghrisson headed northward to Presque Isle to deliver the last of three traditional warnings to the French not to proceed further into Indian land.¹⁸ When the Half King approached the French commander, the *Sieur de Marin*, he asserted "My father, evil tidings are innumerable in the lands where we live. The river where we are belongs to us warriors. The chiefs who look after affairs [the Onondaga Council] are not its masters. It is a road for warriors and not for these chiefs." The Seneca leader went on to say, "I am speaking my father, in the name of all the warriors who inhabit the *Belle Rivière*. With this belt we detain you and ask you to have them cease setting up the establishments you want to make. All the tribes have always called upon us not to allow it." Finally, with a tone of bravado, the Half King proclaimed, "Although I am small, the Master of Life has not given me less courage to oppose these establishments. This is the first and last demand we shall make of you, and I shall strike at whoever does not listen to us."¹⁹

Tanaghrisson's speech underscores the growing autonomy exerted by the Ohio tribes. They intended to conduct their own diplomatic affairs from this point on, unfettered by the dictates of the Onondaga Council. It is also important to note that the Half King was adamant in his contention that the various nations wished neither the French nor the British to build "establishments" and settle the land.

Unfortunately, Captain Marin had no intentions of halting his advance. He scoffed at Tanaghrisson's assertions and replied to the Seneca leader saying, "I despise all the stupid things you said. I know that they come only from you, and that all the warriors and chiefs of the *Belle Rivière* think better than you,

and take pity on their women and children." Then, Marin delivered his own warning, saying "I am obliged to tell you that I shall continue on my way, and if there are any persons bold enough to set up barriers to hinder my march, I shall knock them over so vigorously that they may crush those who made them."²⁰

Monacatootha's efforts fared no better than that of the Half King. Arriving in Winchester with a delegation of Ohio chiefs, the Oneida spokesman informed Virginia's commissioner William Fairfax, "You told Us, You wou'd build a Strong House at the Forks after bidding us take Care of Our Lands; We now request You may not build that Strong House, for we intend to keep Our Country clear of Settlements during these troublesome Times." Receiving little satisfaction from the Virginians, Monacatootha and his delegation traveled to Carlisle to consult with Pennsylvania's envoys—Richard Peters, Isaac Norris, and Benjamin Franklin. Again, the Indians implored the English to "Let none of your People settle beyond where they are now, nor on the Juniata Lands, till the affair is settled between Us and the French." Like the Virginians, the commissioners gave no assurances and the dejected Indians headed back over the mountains to deliberate upon their next course of action.²¹

After a council at Loggstown, Tanaghrisson and Monacatootha decided to cast their lot with the British. At the moment, French impunity and aggression seemed worse than designs by the English. Without some material support from the provincials, the Indians realized they could not stop the French advance. On October 27, 1753, the chiefs dispatched a message to Pennsylvania governor James Hamilton, saying "We beg our Brothers Assistance with quick Dispatch, and for the Security of our Words We send You this belt of Wampum, and We beg You will come to our assistance."²²

Due to the Quaker control of the assembly and an internal power struggle between the provincial government and the proprietary interests, Pennsylvania failed to respond to the Indians's plea for aid. Virginia did not suffer under the same constraints, however, and the governor, Robert Dinwiddie, moved to counter French occupation of the Ohio Country. Instead of sending the Indians guns, powder, and men, however, Dinwiddie chose to dispatch his own envoy, twenty-one-year-old Maj. George Washington, to deliver a summons to the French to depart from the Ohio River Valley region.

Washington arrived at Loggstown in late November where he conferred with the Half King and other Ohio chiefs. Tanaghrisson related the substance of his speech to Marin and agreed to guide the young major to the north,

where the French were wintering in under a new commander, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre. The French advance had stalled just south of Lake Erie at an outpost labeled Fort LeBoeuf, located along the headwaters of a stream which became known as French Creek.²³ Due to the unusually shallow nature of the creek, the French had been forced to hire neighboring Delawares to transport supplies downstream to their next intended outpost, Fort Venango, located at the confluence with the Allegheny River. These Indians, however, further disrupted the progress of the invasion by looting the supplies. This underscores the fact that the Indians living in the vicinity were not entirely devoted to the French. When Washington arrived at Fort LeBoeuf to deliver Governor Dinwiddie's ultimatum, the French garrison was holding on by just a thread.²⁴

Despite the deplorable condition of his troops, Legardeur Saint-Pierre remained resolute in his determination to hold on to the Ohio Country. He informed Washington that he did not feel obliged to obey Dinwiddie's order to withdraw. With the French response in hand, Washington headed back to Virginia to prepare for war. Before departing, the major cautioned Tanaghrisson not to be influenced by French "flattery." The Half King assured the major that "he knew the French too well, for any thing to engage him in their favour."²⁵

The French delay in advancing down the Ohio presented Governor Dinwiddie with an opportunity to reinforce Virginia's claim to the region by building his own fort in the Ohio Country. As Washington traveled back to Williamsburg, he encountered "seventeen horses loaded with materials and stores for a fort" which Dinwiddie intended to build on the strategic triangle of land known as the Forks of the Ohio. When the construction crew, under the command of Capt. William Trent and Ensign Edward Ward, arrived at the confluence of the three rivers, there to meet them were the Half King and Monacatotha, along with a delegation of other Ohio Indians. Tanaghrisson, given the honor of laying the first log, proclaimed "that [the] Fort belonged to the English and them and whoever offered to prevent the building of it they the Indians would make war against them." During the construction, Trent and Ward were dependant upon local Delawares to provide them with game to eat. These Indians, perhaps fearful of a British outpost so close to their villages, refused to cooperate. The Delawares and Shawnees who lived in the vicinity were becoming wary of the Half King's strategic decision to side with the English. Should war between the two European rivals come to their land, they would be caught in the middle.²⁶

No sooner had Ensign Ward hung the gates on the stockade than, on April 17, 1754, a large French force, commanded by Capt. Claude-Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur, arrived at the fort. Contrecoeur demanded that Ward immediately surrender his outpost and retire back to Virginia with his handful of men. Outnumbered and with few provisions, Ward had no recourse but to yield. As the bedraggled Virginians departed, the Half King shouted defiantly to the French that he had ordered the fort to be built and had laid the first log.²⁷

Ensign Ward and his dejected command straggled into Wills Creek, Maryland on April 25, 1754. There he met George Washington at the head of a small force of 132 men from the Virginia Regiment. Washington, promoted to lieutenant colonel, had departed from Alexandria, Virginia, with orders from Governor Dinwiddie to garrison the fort that Ward had just surrendered at the Forks of the Ohio. According to Dinwiddie's plan, the colonel could expect reinforcements from the remainder of the Virginia Regiment, along with additional troops from South Carolina, New York, Maryland, and North Carolina. With such a force, there could be no doubt that the British would expel the French from the Ohio Country.²⁸

Dinwiddie and Washington also hoped for support from Tanaghrisson and the Ohio Indians. Upon his arrival at Wills Creek, Ward presented Colonel Washington with a letter dictated by the Half King. In it, the Seneca leader stated "We have been waiting this long time for the French to Strike Us, now we see what they design to do with Us; we are ready to strike them now, and wait your Assistance. Be strong, and come as soon as possible." Washington responded to Tanaghrisson's dispatch in a boastful manner informing him that "a small part of our army [is] making towards you, clearing the roads for a great number of our warriors, who are ready to follow us, with our great guns, our ammunition and provisions."²⁹

Washington marched out of Wills Creek with his meager force hoping to establish a base camp along the Monongahela River. From this point, the colonel could collect his supplies and reinforcements before launching an attack against the French, who were by then entrenched at the Forks of the Ohio in their own stockade called Fort Duquesne. Along the trail, Ohio Indians kept the colonel informed as to the disposition of the enemy. For his part, Washington tried to keep the Half King apprised of the progress of his march. On May 19, he dispatched a note to the Seneca chief saying, "be of good courage, my brethren, and march vigorously towards your brethren the English; for fresh forces will soon join them, who will protect you against your treacherous enemy the French."³⁰ Four days later, the colonel received a

reply from Tanaghrisson warning him that a "freench army" was on the march and deisin'd to strik ye forist English they see."³¹ By May 24, the Virginians had advanced nearly fifty miles to a place known as the Great Meadows. The open area offered lush pasture for his livestock and Washington decided to halt and establish a base camp.

Three days later, an Indian courier from Tanaghrisson arrived at Washington's camp to inform him that a party of fifty French soldiers were in the vicinity. The chief, eager to engage the French, encouraged Washington to join him. The young colonel, now convinced as a result of Tanaghrisson's messages, that the French intended to attack him, agreed to follow the Indian messenger back to the chief's camp. Washington picked forty men and set off into what he later described as a "night as black as pitch" to link up with the Half King. The Virginians reached the Indian camp just before dawn. Perhaps Washington was surprised to find less than a dozen warriors. He was certainly under the impression that all the Ohio tribes would rally to join the British since he had previously written to Governor Dinwiddie to quickly forward six hundred pounds of provisions to feed the Indians. Regardless of expectations, the colonel sat down and counseled with Tanaghrisson who informed him that he knew the location of the French and that, with stealth, it would be easy to surround them. Whether Washington ever stopped to think that an attack against the French at this juncture would make the British appear as the aggressors is not recorded. Up until this moment the French had been resolute in their determination to hold the Ohio Country, but they had not yet fired in anger at their rivals. This was about to change as the Virginians and their Indian allies approached the French camp that was nestled in a ravine at the base of a rocky cliff.³²

Thirty-two French soldiers, under the command of Ensign Coulon de Jumonville, were just awakening to face a new day when one of the men looked up to see the Virginians on the steep rocks above. Gunfire exploded in the forest in a sharp skirmish that lasted less than fifteen minutes. When the smoke cleared, eight French soldiers lay either dead or wounded. Naturally, it will never be known who fired the first shot. According to the French version, upon the first fire Ensign Jumonville, through an interpreter, called out that he was an envoy on a diplomatic mission to warn off the English, just as Washington had done the previous winter. The French account further claimed that the Virginians stopped firing, went down the ravine, and surrounded Jumonville and his men. The French commander then proceeded to have the summons ordering the English to retire read to Washington and his

men. Without warning, the French claimed, one of the Virginians shot Jumonville in the head.³³

Naturally, the English version is quite different. Washington wrote in his journal, "We killed M. De Jumonville, commanding this party, with nine others; we wounded one and made twenty-one prisoners."³⁴ The statistics Washington provides is revealing. Considering the confused nature of the sharp skirmish and the accuracy of eighteenth century weapons, it is unlikely that the Virginians felled ten enemies while only wounding one. Something must have happened after the initial exchange of gunfire that dispatched the wounded soldiers. The answer can be found in a second hand account of the action provided by John Shaw, a soldier in the ranks of the Virginia Regiment who did not participate in the battle. According to an affidavit provided by Shaw several years after the affair, he obtained the facts from a number of soldiers in his unit who were present during the engagement. Shaw stated that following the initial attack, the French scattered but their escape rout was blocked by Tanaghrisson's warriors. The Frenchmen then ran back to the Virginians asking for quarter. Shaw then related, "Sometime after, the Indians Came up, the Half King took his Tomahawk and Splitt the head of the french Captain [Ensign Jumonville]; having first Asked if he was an Englishman And having been told that he was a french man, he then took out his Brains, and washed his hands with them, And then Scalped him."³⁵

Shaw's version of events rings with authenticity due to the fact that, first of all, it is supported by several eye witness accounts. John Davison, a trader and interpreter who was present at the battle stated "that there were but Eight Indians who did most of the Execution that was done." He went on to claim that "when the English fired, which they did in great Confusion, the Indians came out of their Cover and closed with the French and killed them with their Tomhaws, on which the French surrendered." Monacatootha, who also participated in the skirmish, claimed that most of the fighting had been done by the Indians. He later told Pennsylvania Governor Robert Hunter Morris that "We [the Indians] and a few of our Brothers fought with them. Ten were killed and Twenty-one were taken alive whom we delivered to Coll. Washington, telling him that he had blooded the Edge of his Hatchet a little." This version is further substantiated by a report of the battle that appeared in the June 27, 1754 edition of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This version maintains that the French fired first, then "The English returned the Fire, and killed 7 or 8 of the French, on which the Rest took to their Heels; but the Half King, and his Indians, who lay in Ambush to cut them off in

their Retreat, fell upon them, and soon killed and scalped Five of them." The report went on to state that "One of those Five which were killed and scalped by the Indians, was Monsieur Jumonsville, an Ensign, whom the Half King himself dispatched with his Tomahawk."³⁶

Perhaps most importantly, Shaw's version is supported by the fact that, while no state of armed conflict yet existed between the two European powers, the Ohio Indians had already made their declaration of war against the French. The Half King's grizzly act of tomahawking Ensign Jumonville was more than an act perpetrated in the heat of combat. It represented a symbolic gesture that signaled an end to the peace that had existed between the French and the Ohio tribes. These people had made it abundantly clear that they intended to conduct their own political affairs free from the meddling of the Onondaga Council. Through their spokesman, Tanaghrisson, they had issued the traditional three warnings to the French to halt their advance. When these military forces continued to penetrate into their sanctuary, the resolve of the Ohio Indians began to wane. Hoping to reestablish the initiative and to inspire both the Indians and the British to take more decisive action, the Half King used Washington to advance his own agenda. It was Tanaghrisson who goaded young Washington into the fateful encounter at what became known as the Battle of Jumonville Glen; and, it was Tanaghrisson who ended any chance of reconciliation between the two European adversaries by killing the hapless Ensign Jumonville. Later, when news of the skirmish reached London, the noted British statesman Horace Walpole remarked, "The volley fired by a young Virginian in the backwoods of America has just set the world on fire." In reality, it was an aged Seneca sachem who began the first of the World Wars.³⁷

The dye had been cast at Jumonville Glen and the Half King hoped that the skirmish would serve as a rallying cry for the Ohio tribes. Monacatootha conveyed the French scalps to the Mingo, Delaware, and Shawnee living in the region "in order to inform them that they had attacked the French, and to ask for their assistance to uphold this first blow." To that end, a council was held a short distance from the Great Meadows involving Colonel Washington, Tanaghrisson, and important representatives from the Delaware and Shawnee nations. During the conference, both Washington and the Half King implored the Indians to start "sharpening their hatchets in order to join and unite vigorously" in their efforts to expel the French. The colonel further offered sanctuary to the warriors's families and promised "to feed and clothe" the women and children during the upcoming struggle. The Indians took one

look at Washington's meager force and the lack of provisions he had for his own men and decided not to join in the impending battle. The Delawares and Shawnees further realized that if they were to join the British, it would require them to abandon their homes that were situated so precariously close to the French forts at LeBoeuf, Venango, and Duquesne. They would be refugees from their own country so long as the war lasted. In addition, these Ohio Indians recognized that they would be risking their lives to fight alongside an ally that had never been altogether reliable. Before melting back into the forest, however, the Delaware chief Shingas came to Washington and gave him "strong assurances that they would assist us."³⁸ With that, the Indians disappeared, presumably leaving Washington to fend for himself against the French. Even the stalwart Half King began to waver. Without support from the other Ohio tribes, he recognized that Washington's men would be no match for the French, despite the fact that the colonel's force had recently been augmented by additional reinforcements which swelled the ranks to nearly four hundred men. To protect his command, Colonel Washington hastily threw up a small circular stockade protected by entrenchments which he dubbed Fort Necessity. The Half King later contemptuously referred to the compound as "that little thing upon the Meadow."³⁹ Driven by the futility of the enterprise, Tanaghrisson gathered up his family and departed the Great Meadows.

Since that time, historians have been convinced that the Indians abandoned George Washington to his fate at Fort Necessity. On the contrary, however, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the Ohio Country Indians acted out one final role at the Great Meadows that may have spared young Washington from a French dungeon or, perhaps even saved his life.

When the French commander Contrecoeur learned of the attack at Jumonville Glen, he quickly organized a force of five hundred soldiers to launch a counterattack against the British. The captain could only recruit "eleven Indians from the various Ohio River Nations" to guide the expedition, however. Just as the command was about to get underway, a reinforcement of twenty Canadians and 130 French Indians arrived at Fort Duquesne. Ironically, these men were led by Captain Louis Coulon de Villiers, Ensign Jumonville's brother. When Captain Villiers learned of his brother's fate, he begged Contrecoeur to place him in command of the expedition. Villiers then assembled his Indian allies, calling upon them to take hold of the war hatchet and aid him "to avenge the death of His brother." He then turned to the Delawares who were present and said "If you are the true children of Onontio

[the French] I invite you to Follow the example of your brothers." While Villiers failed to record how the Ohio Indians responded to his pleas, he did mention that some of his own warriors refused to participate. One Canadian Iroquois refused to take the hatchet saying that his band came only "to work for the common good and in the same way they did not want to disturb the land and their father Onontio had assured them that they would only be onlookers, and to maintain the Peace."⁴⁰

On June 28, Villiers received his orders from Contrecoeur calling upon him "to go meet the English army...attack them if he sees clear to do so and destroy them even totally if he can in order to punish them for the murder that they inflicted on us in violating the most sacred rights of Civilized Nations." With that, the expedition set off in flat-bottomed boats and canoes to find George Washington. Villiers had under his command six hundred French and Canadian soldiers, and approximately one hundred Indians. These warriors represented the Huron, Abenaki, Nippising, Ottawa, Algonquin, and Canadian Iroquois nations. Also traveling with the French, were a handful of Ohio Country Indians. That evening, after making camp Villiers called together his warriors to inquire as to the best possible route. The French Indians quickly "deferred to a Seneca chief from the Ohio River as knowing the locale better." This remark underscores the fact that none of Villiers's own Indians knew anything about the region. It also proves that some of the Ohio Indians had, in effect, infiltrated the French command. This is confirmed by the fact that, in his journal, Villiers bitterly complained about the lack of cooperation he received from his scouts. He would send them out to reconnoiter and they would fail to return in a timely fashion. At one point the Ohio Indian guides came running back to the French captain to report that "the English were coming in Battle formation to attack." This Indian subterfuge likely was designed to encourage the French to turn back and prevent them from attacking Washington's exposed position at the Great Meadows. The ploy failed however and Villiers concluded that his Indian scouts had "misled" him.⁴¹

On July 3, Captain Villiers finally reached the Great Meadows and invested Fort Necessity. In the furious battle that ensued, Washington's command was decimated as the French, from the forest cover, poured a deadly fire into the exposed troops. By nightfall thirty of Washington's men had been killed and more than twice that number wounded. To compound this melancholy situation, rain began to pour down making most of the firearms unserviceable. Some of the men, perhaps contemplating the fate that awaited them, broke

into the storehouse in the fort and began to get drunk on rum. Washington's soldiers fully expected that at any moment the French and their Indian allies would rush the fort and finish them off. Nonetheless, the colonel remained resolute, writing afterward, "Our men behaved with singular intrepidity, and we determined not to ask for quarter but with our bayonets screwed, to sell our lives as dearly as possible."⁴²

Then, miraculously, from out of the darkness, the Virginians heard someone cry out, "Voulez-vous parler?" At first, Colonel Washington believed it to be a ruse. Why would "such a vastly superior Force, and possessed of such an Advantage" wish to parley, Washington asked himself. To this day, students of the engagement at Fort Necessity have asked the same question. In his journal, Captain Villiers explained his decision to negotiate with his enemy by stating "As we had been exposed to the rain all day long, and the Detachment was very tired, and the Indians had informed they were leaving the next day, and it was repeated continually that drum beats or cannon fire were heard in the distance, I proposed...that we offer to speak with the English." Soldiers inured to campaigning are surely not willing to stop fighting due simply to rain or fatigue. The French Indians were hardly needed once the siege had begun. They amounted to only about one hundred warriors, while the captain still had more than five hundred soldiers under his command. In short, Villiers had become falsely convinced that Washington was about to be reinforced. Therefore, he decided to break off the attack and extract a surrender from Washington with an admission of the assassination of Ensign Jumonville. A document of this nature would be invaluable in the court of world opinion and prove that the British were the aggressors in the conflict. With the belief that British forces were pressing down upon him, Captain Villiers compelled Washington to sign the "Articles of Capitulation" admitting to the murder of his brother.⁴³ After that, the French detachment hastily withdrew.

The one question that remains after 250 years—begging to be answered—who provided Villiers with the false intelligence that "it was repeated continually that drum beats or cannon fire were heard in the distance." The logical answer—Ohio Country Indians who had attached themselves to the French command. Only these warriors would have been ranging throughout the forest during the battle. The Ohio Indians were astute enough to realize that Washington represented the only countervailing force to French presence in their country. To spare him to fight another day would, in turn, provide the Indians with continued leverage to use against the French for the duration of the impending war. They were, in fact, continuing to use a policy

that allowed them to chart their own destiny, one that would not relegate them to the status of pawns manipulated by the larger European powers. Unfortunately, not even Washington understood or recognized the great service that the Ohio Indians had done for him that day at the Great Meadows. As the defeated Virginians were marching out of their battered fort, the colonel and his men noticed "there were many of our Friend Indians along with the French, sundry of which came up, and spoke to them, told them they were their Brothers, and ask them how they did, particularly, Susquehanna Jack, and others, who distinguished themselves by their Names; and it is also said, that some of the Delawares were there."⁴⁴ In the end, the Delaware chief Shingas had made good on his promise to George Washington.

Two months after Washington's defeat at Fort Necessity, the Ohio Country chiefs gathered at Aughwick, the home of the trader George Croghan. The Delawares, still settled around Fort Duquesne, continued to gather and report intelligence on French movements to Tanaghrisson and the English. Their chiefs had come to the council to assure the Half King and the British that they had not gone over to the French. For the Ohio tribes, however, this was becoming increasingly difficult due to the lack of support they had received from the provinces. At one point during the conference, Shingas's brother, the noted chief Tamaqua, rose and addressed Tanaghrisson in words that would prove to be prophetic. He said, "You...told Us that You took Us under your Protection, and that We must not meddle with Wars.... We have hitherto followed your directions and lived very easy under your Protection, and no high Wind did blow to make Us uneasy; but now Things seem to take another turn, and a high Wind is rising."⁴⁵

NOTES

1. William M. Darlington, ed., *Christopher Gist's Journals* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2002), 74, 142–43. According to the antiquarian, William M. Darlington, the stone with Gist's inscription stood along Standing Stone Creek near present-day Hainesville, West Virginia. As Darlington relates, "The date cut by Gist, February, 1751, was in accordance with the old style of computation, by which the year began on the 25th of march, instead of the 1st of January, to which it was changed throughout the British Dominions by law, in 1751, the new style to commence on January 1, 1752. Why Gist cut the date 1751 instead of 1752 is not easy to explain, especially as his Journal is kept by the new method of computing time."
2. Céloron de Blainville, who led this 1749 expedition to the Ohio Country, paused at the confluence of important streams and rivers to bury these lead tablets which claimed all the land drained by the

- Ohio River for the French. See Andrew Gallup, ed., *The Céloron Expedition to the Ohio Country, 1749* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1997), 29.
3. In the last twenty years there has been an explosion in ethnohistorical studies that emphasize the dynamic role played by Indians in early America. For example, see Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800* (New York: Syracuse University press, 1987; reprint ed., University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003); Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies & Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and, Michael McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio River Valley and its People, 1724–1774* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).
4. For a discussion of Indian migration into the Appalachian Plateau see McConnell, *A Country Between*, 5–20. For the origin of the word “Mingo” see George P. Donehoo, *A History of the Indian Villages and Place Names in Pennsylvania* (Reprint ed., Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 1998), 108.
5. “Conrad Weiser’s Journal of a Tour to the Ohio, August 11–October 2, 1748,” in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 31, 42.
6. For a discussion of Pennsylvania’s Indian policy during this juncture see Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 33–35.
7. For an example of this confusion regarding the nature of Tanaghrisson’s status see Lois Mulkearn, “Half King, Seneca Diplomat of the Ohio Valley,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 37 (Summer 1954): 65–66. Michael McConnell believes that “His subsequent lofty historical role as a Six Nations ‘regent’ or ‘viceroys’ in the Ohio Country was the product of later generations of scholars. See McConnell, *A Country Between*, 75. Perhaps the noted ethnohistorian, Francis Jennings, is most accurate in asserting that Tanaghrisson had indeed been dispatched by the Onondaga Council to serve as a viceroys. See Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 29.
8. The “Covenant Chain” relationship between the Iroquois and the various English colonies is thoroughly discussed in a variety of works. See Richard Aquila, *The Iroquois Restoration: Iroquois Diplomacy on the Colonial Frontier, 1701–1754* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983); Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984); and, Richter and Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain*.
9. Samuel Hazard, ed., *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania: Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, 16 vols. (Harrisburg: Theodore Finn, 1851; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1968) 5:146–47. A colorful description of Monacatotha can be found in Richard C. Alberts, *A Charming Field for an Encounter: The Story of George Washington’s Fort Necessity* (Washington, D.C.: Government printing Office, 1991), 6. A more complete biography of the Oneida leader is contained in C. Hale Sipe, *Indian Chiefs of Pennsylvania* (Butler, PA: privately printed, 1927; reprint, Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 1994), 213–54.
10. Gallup, *The Celoron Expedition*, 32–33.
11. Gallup, *The Celoron Expedition*, 46.
12. Darlington, *Christopher Gist’s Journals*, 78.

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13. C. Van Doren and Julian P. Boyd, eds., *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin, 1736–1762* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1938), 69.
14. "The Treaty of Logg's Town, 1752," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 13 (1906), 168.
15. The Treaty of Loggstown has been the source of considerable speculation among historians. Michael McConnell states that the council was marked by "considerable confusion." Likewise, Francis Jennings insists that "the treaty was conducted in a welter of cross-purposes and intrigue that almost baffles comprehension; it seems to have had more conspiracies present than people." Both of these scholars conclude that, in the end, Tanaghriison "sold out" by affirming the questionable land transaction made at Lancaster in 1744. A perusal of the document would tend to support this conclusion. A careful reading of the treaty minutes, however, could reveal an entirely different interpretation. Throughout the document, the Half King remains adamant that no matter what transpired during the negotiations, the final decision in regard to land transactions had to be made by the Onondaga Council. He maintained that he would only confirm what the New York Iroquois had already agreed upon, knowing full well that they had not assented to such a large cession of land. See McConnell, *A Country Between*, 95–96, and Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 37–45. For a different interpretation of the treaty, pay particular attention to passages found in "The Treaty of Logg's Town, 1752" on pages 169, 171, and 173.
16. Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 5:614–15; Sewell Elias Slick, *William Trent and the West* (reprint ed., Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 2001), 34–36.
17. During this attack on Pickawillany, the Ottawa and Chippewa warriors under Langlade's direction, executed the village chief Memeskia, known among the English as Old Briton. See White, *The Middle Ground*, 230–31.
18. Previous warnings had been given to the French expedition at Niagara and at Presque Isle. See Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 5:666. Before departing on these diplomatic missions, Tanaghriison and Monacatotha told the trader William Trent "that they had come to a Resolution to warn the French off their Land, and if they did not go they would fall upon them. Trent's journal can be found in Mary C. Darlington, ed., *History of Col. Henry Bouquet and the Western Frontiers of Pennsylvania, 1747–1764* (Pittsburgh: Privately printed, 1920, reprint ed., Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, 1993), 39–40.
19. Tanaghriison's speech can be found in Fernand Grenier, ed., *Papiers Contrecoeur et autres documents concernant le conflit anglo-français sur l'Ohio de 1745 à 1756* (Quebec: I. Quebec, Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1952), 53–58. A translation can be found in Donald H. Kent, *The French Invasion of Western Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1954), 47–49.
20. See Kent, *The French Invasion*, 50.
21. Information on the councils at Winchester and Carlisle can be found in Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 54–60; and, Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 5:666–86.
22. When the Pennsylvania authorities received this message, they were reluctant to accept its authenticity since the communication further stated that the Indians had agreed to cede all the lands on the eastern bank of the Ohio to the British in compensation for the loss suffered by traders at the hands of the French. It is indeed doubtful that the Ohio tribes were willing to relinquish such a large amount of land and that this portion of the document was likely fabricated by the traders who recorded the message. This does not, however, undermine the entire contents of the note. The substance of the appeal is reinforced by a letter that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 27, 1753. See Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 5:691–95.

23. The Sieur Marin died on October 29, 1753. See Kent, *The French Invasion*, 62.
24. Later, the French governor, the Marquis de Duquesne, in commenting on the causes for the delayed advance, stated that "the Sonontans [Senecas] had mutinied and insolently blocked the road." See Kent, *The French Invasion*, 68.
25. Washington's journal can be found in a variety of sources. The material quoted herein comes from Don Marshall Larrabee, ed., *The Journals of George Washington and His Guide, Christopher Gist, Reciting Their Experiences on the Historic Mission from Governor Dinwiddie, of Virginia, to the French Forts in November-December, 1753* (Privately printed, 1950), 21.
26. Larrabee, *Washington's Journal*, 22; Deposition of Edward Ward, June 13, 1756, in Darlington, *History of Col. Bouquet*, 43.
27. "Summons by Order of Monsieur Contrecoeur to the Commander of the King of Britain, at the Mouth of the River Monongahela, April 16, 1754, in Neville B. Craig, ed., *The Olden Time*, 2 vols. (Pittsburgh: Wright & Charlton, 1846; reprint ed., Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 2002), 1:83-84; Ward Deposition, 47; and, Mulkearn, "Half King," 78.
28. Background information on Washington's 1754 campaign can be found in Charles H. Ambler, *George Washington and the West* (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 1936), 52-61; and Robert C. Alberts, *A Charming Field for an Encounter: The Story of George Washington's Fort Necessity* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1975), 3-11.
29. Tanaghrisson's letter can be found in Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 6:31. Washington's reply is contained in "Speech to the Indians at Wills Creek," April 23, 1754, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources* 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1944), electronic version at <http://etext.virginia.edu> [hereafter cited as *Washington Writings*].
30. Speech to the Half King, May 19, 1754, in *Washington Writings*.
31. Washington to Dinwiddie, May 27, 1754, in *Washington Writings*.
32. On May 9, Washington wrote to Governor Dinwiddie that the Half King was on his way to join him with fifty warriors. See Washington to Dinwiddie, May 9, 1754, in *Washington Writings*. Also see Washington to Dinwiddie, May 27, 1754, *Ibid.* The colonel's night march and counsel with Tanaghrisson can be found in Donald H. Kent, ed., *Contrecoeur's Copy of George Washington's Journal for 1754* (Washington: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1989), 16. This booklet is a reprint from an article that appeared in *Pennsylvania History*, 19 (January 1952).
33. This French version can be found in "Memoire contenant le Precis des faits, &c.," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:189-90.
34. Kent, *George Washington's Journal*, 1754, 16.
35. Hayes Baker-Crothers and Ruth Allison Hudnut, "A Private Soldier's Account of Washington's First Battles in the West; A Study in Historical Criticism," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 10 (1952), 24.
36. The statements of Davison and Monacatotha can be found in Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 6:195. See also *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 27, 1754.
37. This interpretation of the events at Jumonville Glen is supported by other historians working in the field. See Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 5-7, 52-58; and, Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 68-70. It is interesting to note that, at the time, even Governor Dinwiddie understood what had really happened at Jumonville Glen. In a letter to London ministers, the Governor stated that the, "little skirmish

- was really the work of the Half King and...Indians. We were as auxiliaries to them." See Martin West, ed., *War for Empire in Western Pennsylvania* (Ligonier, PA: Fort Ligonier Association, 1993), 20. Walpole's quote can be found in Alberts, *A Charming Field for an Encounter*, 20.
38. Kent, *George Washington's Journal*, 18–25.
39. The Half King's description of Fort Necessity can be found in Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 6:152.
40. The record of Villiers's expedition can be found in "Journal of the Campaign of Coulon de Villiers, Fort Duquesne, June 26–July 7, 1754, Archives Nationales, Colonies (Paris), series F3, vol. 14, folios 52 verso–60 recto. This journal has been translated and excerpted with variations in a variety of sources, including Craig, *The Olden Time*, 2:210–15; and Hugh Cleland, ed., *George Washington in the Ohio Valley* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), 105–112. Perhaps the most complete translation can be found in Joseph L. Peyser, ed., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country, 1686–1783* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 198–208. The author has used Peyser's translation for this study [hereafter cited as Villier's Journal].
41. Villiers Journal, 201–204. Determining the size and composition of Villiers's force is difficult. Perhaps the best figures available come from a letter written by a government official named Varin to the Intendant of New France, François Bigot. See Varin to Bigot, July 24, 1754, in Sylvester K. Stevens and Donald H. Kent, eds., *Wilderness Chronicles of Northwestern Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1941; reprint ed., Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 2002), 80–82.
42. One of the best accounts of the battle at Fort Necessity can be found in Alberts, *A Charming Field for an Encounter*, 31–34. The quote from Washington can be found in the *Virginia Gazette*, July 19, 1754 and reprinted in Ambler, *Washington and the West*, 211. It would have been extremely difficult for Washington's men to have defended themselves with bayonets since there were few such weapons available. See Fred Anderson, ed., *Washington Remembers: Reflections on the French and Indian War* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 17.
43. Villiers Journal, 205. The surrender document is contained in Villiers's Journal, 205–207. After the formal surrender ceremony the next morning, Villiers commented that, "I hurried to leave."
44. See *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 25, 1754.
45. Hazard, *Colonial Records*, 6:148–60. Tamaqua's quote is found on pages 151–52.