

# LORD DUNMORE'S WAR

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According to one historian, "Dunmore's War was a most important event . . . no work with which I am acquainted does the subject justice. It was truly a great event both in respect to the parties engaged and the consequences growing out of it. It has been passed over too slightly by historians." Another writer observes: that the war was a needless occurrence and could easily have been avoided but for the land-hungry Virginia colonials. Included in the latter category was the governor of Virginia - John Murray, alias the Fourth Earl of Dunmore, Viscount Fincastle, Baron of Blair, of Melin and of Tillimet. I'll let you decide where the issue should be resolved.

Let us now look at the parties involved. Certainly Dunmore was one of the leading actors in the story. Born in Scotland in 1732, and member of the Royal House of Stuarts, he came to the colonies to enhance his personal fortune. He was colonial governor of New York and the last colonial governor of Virginia. Other, though less official, titles that he received were: African Hero and Conspirator. I found some verse about this controversial little governor. It goes:

"Great Dunmore our General valiant and bold,  
Excelles the Great Heroes -- the Heroes of Old.  
When he doth command we will always obey,  
When he bids us fight we will not turn away."

Dunmore was destined to become the first full-fledged villain to step from the wings as the Rev. War unfolded. But this is getting a little ahead of the story. Let's turn to some of these thrilling events of yesteryear leading up to what has been called the first battle of the American Revolution (especially by West Virginia historians).

For a number of years prior to 1774 conflicts between red man and white on the western frontier were occurring with greater frequency. Many peaceful whites and reds were killed during these hostilities. At issue were a number of factors. One was a border conflict. Where was the rightful border of Virginia? Of Pennsylvania? What land belonged to the 'numerous tribes and Nations of Indians of the Ohio country? The Pennsylvania colonials were primarily interested in carrying on the fur trade with the Indians. The Virginians were interested in trade but also settlement -- settlement in areas where boundaries were vague. The westward-moving Virginians met varying degrees of resistance as they moved into what is now West Virginia and Kentucky. Dunmore himself was anxious to get as much land as he could. In 1770 he had petitioned the Board of Trade for a personal grant of 100,000 acres. As Governor of

Virginia, his thirst for land did not abate. Through his agent and surveyor, Dr. John Connolloy, Dunmore continually pressed for more land. Dr. Connolloy was well-suited for his task. He repaired the dilapidated Ft. Pitt and renamed it Ft. Dunmore. While in the west, Connolloy seized upon any excuse to inflame the settlers against the red man. He certainly didn't want to see the Pennsylvanians succeed in their lucrative fur trade and if open war erupted, he and his Lord and master would be sure to increase their holdings.

By the spring of 1774, things were warming up fast along the border. When a rum-runner named Daniel Girty lured 10 friendly Indians to his camp for a shooting match, plied them well with his rum and slaughtered them all -- you might say the war was on. Since his brother and sister were killed there, the great Mingoe leader, Chief Logan, long a friend of the whites, took his revenge. Before his rampages ended, he had collected over thirty white scalps as he had promised.

The Settlers and frontiersmen of the border regions looked to Governor Dunmore of Virginia for help. Now the Virginia House of Burgesses thought that this was a good idea and authorized the governor to raise troops. They wanted to impose an excise tax on imported slaves, but Dunmore vetoed this and began to raise troops out of his own money. He envisioned a force of 3,000 to go to the Shawnee towns on the Pickaway Plains and end this brutal warfare in the back country. He viewed it as a kind of 'police action'. He was very practical, though not very diplomatic in his dealings with the British Government through the Colonial Officer, Lord Baltimore. The Home Office rebuked Murray for his activities in the west and his eagerness for land. Also, in the momentous Quebec Act, April, 1774, the British government had extended the boundary of Quebec province to the Ohio River. Dunmore, however, knew well the spirit of the frontiersmen and he indicates this in a letter to Lord Baltimore: "I have learned from experience that the established authority of government in America and policy of government at home, are insufficient to restrain the Americans; that they do and will remove as their avidity and restlessness incite them. They acquire no attachment to place: but wandering about seems engrafted in their nature -- they are ever hungering for lands still farther off -- still better."

So, he made ready for battle. Dunmore was to raise 1500 troops and one Andrew Lewis to raise another 1500. Each force was to march by separate routes and to join forces at or near the mouth of the Big Kanawa River. Once there the forces would march to the heart of the Indian villages (actually in Canada). En route, Dunmore discovered a shorter way, up the Hocking, and sent word to Lewis who had arrived at a triangular point of land bordered by the Ohio and Kanawa Rivers and named by his men Camp Point Pleasant.

Meanwhile, back at the Indian towns, the great leader and Shawnee, Cornstalk, had been unsuccessfully playing the role of Dove. Out voted on the war issue (his personal feelings aside) he decided to lead one thousand warriors against the white troops. Well aware of the progress of both forces toward his homeland, he knew he had to hit one of the colonial

groups before they joined forces. On Sunday evening, October 11, 1774, he and his warriors crossed the Ohio on rafts. At just before daybreak the next day, a couple of disgruntled soldiers were out hunting for a little turkey,' after accusing Lewis of being unfair in his distribution of beef rations. One was shot and killed when they stumbled upon what the survivor described to Lewis as "some five acres of Indians about two miles from the campsite." Lewis calmly lit his pipe and prepared to do battle. It was just day-break when the battle began. The fighting was 'hot' until noon, then after a short lull, it was on again. Lewis knew that to win with his back pinned between two rivers, he had to drive Cornstalk's men back from the point. As he drove them back, their line, now about one-half miles long, would get thinner and be easier to break through. Cornstalk's plan, absent the element of surprise, was to drive Lewis' men into the rivers and off the point. In the late afternoon Lewis succeeded in getting some men around the flank of the Indians and the Indians retreated to safer ground thinking it was reinforcement. Estimates of the strength of the Indians vary from 800 to over 1,000. Dunmore's force was about 1,200. The Indians left that night not being able to achieve their objective. Since they didn't return in the morning, Lewis' group were victorious in a sense. Even then a head count was important. By a count of the dead it is questionable, however, as estimates of the colonial dead range from 40 - 80 with considerable numbers wounded. The accounts of the Indian dead run from 20 to over 300.

Dunmore and his men had arrived near Chillicothe and established what was named Camp Charollette. He began peace negotiations with the Indians. When he received word about the victory of Lewis' men in the Battle of Point Pleasant, as it was later to be called, his negotiating position considerably improved. Lewis and his men arrived soon fresh from their victory, and they were ready to search and destroy the Indian towns. Dunmore had a time calling them off and sending them home, but he succeeded. Though there was some rumor of an assassination attempt on the governor, he was also successful in negotiating a treaty with the Indians that was of major significance. It provided that the Indians would not molest any white man on the Ohio River, and allowed the settlers to move into the dark and bloody ground across the river. Another result of this treaty was that the Ohio tribes were generally peaceful during the first two years of the Revolution. This released men to fight in the east and relieved the pressure of a bloody second front in the west.

The fact that Dunmore changed his plan to meet Lewis at Point Pleasant and that he was so liberal in his treaty of Camp Charollette started the conspiracy theory about him. According to this theory, he was actually conspiring with the crown to let Lewis and his motley band of border men get wiped out by Cornstalk or to at least teach these men what would happen if they rebelled against the mother country. Historians have dismissed these tales, but note that the Lord had holdings in Kentucky which would be increased in value by the treaty, and of course the treaty was negotiated on Canadian soil.

Within the year, the Rev. War was on. Dunmore remained loyal to the crown, as did all of the other colonial governors. Though he returned home from the back country a great

hero there, he soon left Virginia fearing for his safety. Before leaving, he tried to get the Negroes to revolt and join the British -- he even issued a proclamation to free them if they joined in the fight against the rebels. In the west, Dr. Connolloy, his faithful agent, was trying, unsuccessfully, to get the Indians to declare war against the Americans.

Dunmore was finally chased from Virginia by General Andrew Lewis, his former subordinate officer. Dunmore died in 1809 after a few years as governor of the Bahamas.

If not the first battle of the American Revolution, then Dunmore's War certainly opened up the west -- especially the settlement of Kentucky. It established a base of operations for the Illinois campaigns of G. R. Clark. While we may not be speaking French, or English with a different accent, had not Dunmore's victory been achieved there, certainly the development of the west would have been much delayed and maybe taken a different course.

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