

FRANCE AND ENGLAND FACE TO FACE IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA –  
WASHINGTON SENT BY THE GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA ON  
A MISSION TO THE FRENCH POSTS

Thus we find, in the spring of 1753, the two great powers of Europe standing face to face, both equally determined to occupy and possess this valley of the Allegheny, with no solution possible but the arbitrament of the sword; England powerfully intrenched behind her hardy colonies, and France advancing to the encounter with all the hereditary chivalry of “La Grande Nation,” well officered, and backed by the great bulk of the most powerful Indian tribes. The first blood shed in this great contest, drawn by the hand of Washington himself, shook the monarchies of Europe to their foundations, and changed the destinies of Christendom.

The year 1753 begins the most interesting chapter in the history of the region of Western Pennsylvania.

Here, among the rugged hills of Western Pennsylvania, on the waters of the Allegheny, began the conflict, apparently for the control of the territory which now yields up one of the greatest staples of modern commerce – embracing one of the most important industrial and commercial centers of the globe – by which eventually enveloped America, Europe and Asia in the sulphury clouds of war. Precipitated the American Revolution and, finally, broke up the ancient feudalism of Europe. The grandest character in this great drama, as the curtain arose upon the opening scene, was far in the background of the glittering throng of crowned and jeweled monarchs, and princes, and famous commanders who crowded to the front; a plain, unpretending lieutenant-colonel of colonial militia.

The trumpet-blast of battle sounded. The scarlet ranks of England, and bonny Highland plume and tartan plaid, the shamrock and the green, and the veteran legions of the Gaul and the hard-won Fontenoy and many other bloody fields came pouring o’er the restless sea, “and swiftly forming in the ranks of war,” prepared, each man, to do his best devoir for king and fatherland. And, side by side with Europe’s veterans, hardy and unflinching as a Spartan band, came the gallant sons of noble sires from all the hills and valleys of the land. And that nothing might be wanting to give effect to all this grand array of war, the dusky sons of the forest, in eagle plumes and gaudy paint, swarmed by thousands through the dim old forest aisles, eager for the fray.

When, after years of strife, the vapors lifted from the “rent and trodden field,” lo, and behold! a nation had been born, baptized in blood, and taken its place among the peoples of the world! And at its head, honored and beloved like none before him, the plain Virginia colonel of the border fray!

Robert Dinwiddie, a native of Scotland, had been appointed Lieutenant Governor of the Virginia colony in 1752. Upon a careful investigation of the situation, he recommended to the Board of Trade in England that a series of fortifications be constructed in the West, for the better protection of the settlers and traders. Captain William Trent was sent, early in the season of 1753, on a mission to the French and Indians; but he seems not to have been the proper person for the position, and, after proceeding as far west as the *Piqua* towns, he became discouraged at the aspect of affairs and returned without accomplishing anything.

The Governor having learned that the French intended to extend their Fortified posts south of Venango and French Creek, resolved to send a messenger immediately to learn their movements, and remonstrate against their designs. He experienced considerable difficulty to find the proper man who was willing to undertake the enterprise, but after careful consideration, and upon learning that Major George Washington would probably accept the position, the Governor concluded to appoint him. Washington was then just past twenty-one, and the bluff Scotchman, to whom he was not unknown, said to him, “Faith, you are a brave lad, and if you play your cards well you shall have no cause to repent of your bargain.”

This appointment was certainly a high compliment to a young man who had just attained his majority, and could only have resulted from great confidence in his judgment and ability.