

## What *Really* Happened?

The textbook a student is issued in a history class is assumed to provide a reliable, accurate, and unbiased account of historical events. Students should be comfortable relying on that textbook as their main source of information. You may challenge these assumptions after you finish this exercise.

The following are excerpts from United States history textbooks published between 1903 and 2000. There also are two additional readings from a United States National Parks Historic site. All of the excerpts concern George Washington's first taste of combat in the action that touched off the French and Indian War.

**From: Current, et al, *American History: A Survey*, 1979**

Within the American wilderness a number of border disputes arose, but the most serious of them concerned the ownership of the Ohio Valley. The French, desiring to control this direct route between Canada and Louisiana, began to build a chain of fortifications to make good of their claim. Pennsylvania fur traders and Virginia land speculators (the latter organized as the Ohio Company) looked to the country across the Alleghenies as a profitable field for their operations; and the British government, aroused to the defense of its territorial rights, gave instructions to the colonial governors to resist French encroachment. Acting on these instructions, the governor of Virginia sent George Washington, then only twenty-one, to lodge protests with the commanders of the French forts newly built between Lake Erie and the Allegheny River. These commanders politely replied that the land was French. In the meantime, a band of Virginians tried to forestall the French by erecting a fort of their own at the strategic key to the Ohio Valley – the forks of the Ohio, where the Allegheny and the Monongahela rivers join. A stronger band of Canadians drove the Virginians away, completed the work, and named it Fort Duquesne.

The colonial government of Virginia again dispatched Washington to deal with the dispute, not as a diplomat this time, but as the leader of a military relief force. Approaching Fort Duquesne, he met a French detachment in a brief but bloody skirmish. He then fell back to a hastily constructed stockade, Fort Duquesne and compelled to surrender (July 4, 1754). The first shots of the French and Indian War had been fired.

**From: Berkin, et al, *American Voices*, 1995**

Great Britain and France, long-standing rivals, were both attempting to build world empires. Each nation had extensive possessions in North America. Trouble arose in a region both countries claimed – the Ohio Valley, valuable for both its fertile land and the rich fur trade with the Indians.

A group of Virginia planters and land speculators formed the Ohio Company in 1747, intending to profit in the fur trade and to sell farmland in the Ohio Valley to new settlers willing to move west of the Appalachian Mountains. The French began building a line of forts to protect the region from British expansion.

In the early 1754 the Ohio Company and the governor of Virginia sent a party of men to build a fort where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio River (where present-day Pittsburgh is). George Washington, a young Virginia militia officer, had identified the importance of this location in an expedition into the area the previous year.

The French had the same idea. They forced the Virginians to leave their site and began to build their own fort: Fort Duquesne. Unaware of the French action, the Virginia governor sent two companies of militia commanded by George Washington to protect Virginian's fort builders. Before reaching the Ohio forks, Washington learned of

the French takeover and of a small party of French troops ahead of him. He led an attack on the party in which the French commander and nine troops were killed. He then fell back and quickly built a crude fort. On July 3, 1754, French and Indian forces attacked, forcing Washington to surrender and lead his militia back to Virginia.

**From: Norton, et al, *A People and a Nation*, 1982**

Beginning the Seven Years' War

The delegates to the Congress did not know that, while they deliberated, the war they sought to prepare for was already beginning. Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia had sent a small militia force westward to counter the French moves. Virginia claimed ownership of the region that is now western Pennsylvania, and Dinwiddie was eager to prevent the French from establishing a permanent post there. But the Virginia militiamen arrived too late. The French had already taken possession of the strategic point – now Pittsburgh – where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio, and they were busily engaged in constructing Fort Duquesne. The foolhardy and inexperienced young colonel who

commanded the Virginians allowed himself to be trapped by the French in his crudely built Fort Necessity at Great Meadows, Pennsylvania. After a day-long battle in which more than one-third of his men were killed or wounded, the twenty-two-year-old George Washington surrendered. He signed a document of capitulation, and he and his men were allowed to return to Virginia.

Washington had blundered grievously. He had started a war that would eventually encompass nearly the entire world. He had also ensured that the Indians of the Ohio Valley would for the most part support France in the coming conflict. The Indians took Washington's mistakes as an indication of Britain's inability to win the war, and nothing that occurred in the next four years made them change their minds.

**From: Muzzey, *The American People*, 1929**

George Washington opens the Great French War. The opening act of the contest for the Ohio valley is of special interest as introducing George Washington on the stage of American history. When the French began to construct a chain of forts to connect Lake Erie with the Ohio River (map, p. for), Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent Washington, a major in the militia, thoroughly familiar with the hardships of forest travel, to warn the French off of territory "so notoriously known to be the property of the crown of Great Britain." Washington faithfully delivered his message to the French commanders at Venango and Fort Le Boeuf in the wilds of northwestern Pennsylvania and was sent again the next year (1754) to anticipate the French in seizing the important position where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio. He clashed with a detachment of French and Indians at Great Meadows, and there the first shot was fired in the great war which was to disturb three continents. The French had secured the "forks of the Ohio" with Fort Duquesne, but Washington erected Fort Necessity close by to assert the claims of England to the region. This garrison was not strong enough, however, to hold the fort, and he was forced to surrender on the Fourth of July, - a day which through his own devotion and courage, a quarter of a century later, was to become forever glorious in our history.

**From: Guitteau, *Our United States: A History*, 1930**

**Washington's First Public Mission.** All of this Ohio Valley region was claimed by Virginia under her

charter of 1609. The governor of Virginia determined to send a written protest to the French, warning them that they were trespassers, and demanding that they

leave the Ohio Valley. The man chosen by Governor Dinwiddie to take this message was a young Virginia surveyor, George Washington. Although only twenty-one years of age

when chosen for this mission, Washington had already gained a reputation for courage, fair-mindedness, and military capacity. Accompanied by Christopher Gist and six other white men, he made his way through the wilderness to Fort Le Boeuf, near the northern boundary of Pennsylvania. The French commander sent Dinwiddie's letter on to Governor Duquesne, and Washington carried back a reply which asserted that the king of France owned all the country west of Allegheny Mountains.

**The French and Indian War, 1756-1763.** Governor Dinwiddie decided to build a fort at the forks of the Ohio River in order to secure this natural gateway to the interior of the continent. For this mission, he again chose Colonel George Washington, who was to command a force of Virginia volunteers. Before Washington could arrive, the French came down the Allegheny River and built a strong fort at the forks of the Ohio, naming it Fort Duquesne. Washington reached Great Meadows, a spot on the western slope of the Alleghenies, before the French blocked his advance. He threw up a rude fortifications called Fort Necessity, but was compelled to surrender to superior numbers on July 4, 1754.

**From: Steele, *Barnes's School History of the United States, 1903***

**Washington's Journey.** \_ Dinwiddie, a lieutenant governor of Virginia, accordingly sent a message by George Washington, then a young man of twenty-one, to the French commander of these forts asking their removal. Washington, after a perilous journey through the wilderness, found the French officer at Fort Venango loud and boastful. At Fort le Boeuf, the commandant treated him with great respect, but, like a true soldier, refused to discuss claims, and declared himself under orders which he should obey. It was clear that France was determined to hold the territory claimed under the discoveries of the heroic La Salle and Marquette. Washington's return through the wilderness, a distance of 400 miles, was full of peril.<sup>1</sup> At last he reached home unharmed and delivered the French commandant's reply.

**War Opens.**—Early the next spring (1754), the French, at the fork of the Monongahela and the Allegheny, drove off a party of English traders and erected fort, which was called Duquesne (du kan'). Soon, among the blackened stumps, corn and barley were growing on the present site of Pittsburg. In the meantime, part of Colonel Fry's regiment of Virginia troops, under Washington, had been sent

to occupy this important point. Learning that the French had anticipated them, Washington hastened forward with a reconnoitering party. Jumonville (zhū mōNveel'), who was hiding among the trees and rocks with a detachment of French troops, waiting an opportunity to attack him, was himself surprised and slain. Washington now retreated to the Great Meadows, where he received some reinforcements, and built a rude stockade, aptly named Fort Necessity. Here he was attacked by a large force of French and Indians, and, after a severe conflict, was compelled to capitulate.

1 The streams were swollen. Sleet was falling and freezing as it fell. The horses gave out, and he was forced to proceed on foot. With only one companion, he quitted the usual path, and with the compass as his guide, struck boldly out through the forest. As Indian lying in wait fired at him only a few paces off, but, missing, was captured. Attempting to cross the Allegheny on a rude raft, they were caught between large masses of ice floating down the rapid current of the mid-channel. Washington thrust out his pole to check the speed, but was jerked into the foaming water. Swimming to an island, he barely saved his life. Fortunately, in the morning the river was frozen over, and he escaped on the ice.

2 Washington's word of command to fire upon that skulking foe (May 28, 1754) was the opening of the campaign. Washington himself, it is said, fired the first shot of that long and bloody war. The first three inter-colonial wars had been merely incidental to wars in Europe. This French and Indian War, on the contrary began in America. It soon spread to the Old World, where it involved most of the countries of Europe and was known there as the Seven Years' War.

**From: Hostadter, et al, *The United States: History of a Republic*, 1957**

Although the war could have been touched off at any point along the Anglo-French border, the immediate provocation came in western Pennsylvania. The French had been building a chain of fortifications in the region, where a group of important Virginia land speculators, the Ohio Company, held claims from which they expected great profit. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, who supported the Ohio Company, had learned through a preliminary expedition (1753-1754) under young George Washington that the French had already built Fort Duquesne on the site of what is now Pittsburgh. After a brief skirmish at Great Meadows, Washington found it advisable to return home.

**From: Bailey and Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, 1983***George Washington Inaugurates War with France*

As the drama unfolded in the New World, the Ohio Valley became the chief bone of contention between the French and British. The Ohio country was the critical area into which the westward-pushing English would inevitably penetrate. It was the key to the continent which the French had to retain, particularly if they were going to link their Canadian holdings with those of the lower Mississippi Valley. By the mid-1700s the English colonials, painfully aware of these basic truths, were no longer so reluctant to bear the burdens of empire. Alarmed by French land-grabbing and cutthroat fur-trade competition in the Ohio Valley, they were determined to fight for their economic security and for the supremacy of their way of life in North America.

Rivalry for the lush lands of the upper Ohio Valley brought tensions to the snapping point. In 1749, a group of English colonial speculators, chiefly influential Virginians including the Washington family, had secured rights to some 500, 999 acres in this region. In the same disputed wilderness the French were in the process of erecting a chain of forts commanding the strategic Ohio River.

In 1753 the governor of Virginia ushered George Washington, a twenty-one-year-old surveyor and fellow Virginian, onto the stage of history. The tall, athletic youth was commissioned to warn the French that they must leave the Ohio Valley; and while delivering the message he was to spy out their armed strength. Already marked out as an able and ambitious young man of promise, Washington completed this dangerous mission, after several brushes with death. But the French were not going to be ejected by mere words. They tightened their hold on the Ohio Valley by building a strong outpost, Fort Duquesne, at the strategic point where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers join to form the Ohio—the later site of Pittsburgh.

In 1754, shortly after his hazardous errand, Washington was sent to the Ohio country as a lieutenant-colonel in command of about 150 Virginia militiamen. Encountering a small detachment of French troops in the forest about forty miles from Fort Duquesne, the Virginians opened fire—the first shots of the globe-girdling new war. The French leader was killed and his men retreated. An exultant Washington wrote: “I heard the bullets whistle, and believe me, there is something charming in he sound.” It soon lost its charm.

The French promptly returned with reinforcements, which surrounded Washington behind his hastily constructed breastworks, Fort Necessity. After a ten-hour siege, he was forced to surrender his entire command in July 1754—ironically the Fourth of July. But he was permitted to march his men away with the

full honors of war.

**From: Todd and Curti, *The Rise of the American Nation*, 1982**

The first clash in America. Wealthy Virginians caused the first series of events that led to the French and Indian War. These colonists formed a company and secured from the British king a huge grant of land in the upper Ohio Valley. They intended to make a profit by dividing the land into small farms and selling the farms to settlers.

The French were alarmed by the Virginians' real estate activities on territory which the French claimed as their own. In 1753 the French started constructing a chain of forts connected Lake Erie with the Ohio River.

The governor of Virginia sent George Washington, a 21-year-old surveyor from Virginia, to the Ohio Valley to warn the French that the land belonged to the British. (The land had been originally granted to Virginia by the charter of 1609. See map, page 24) The French ignored Washington's warning.

The following year Washington, now a major, returned to the Ohio Valley. Leading a company of militia, civilians who trained as soldiers to fight in times of emergency, he built Fort Necessity a few miles south of the French Fort Duquesne. Fort Duquesne itself was situated at the strategic point where the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers join to form the Ohio River—the present site of Pittsburgh (see map, page 47).. A small force of French and Indians defeated Washington and his troops in a battle fought at Fort Necessity on July 4, 1754.

In the summer of 1754, the governor of Virginia sent a militia force (under the command of an inexperienced young colonel, George Washington) into the Ohio Valley to challenge French expansion. Washington built a crude stockade (Fort Necessity) not far from Fort Duquesne, the larger outpost the French were building on the site of what is now Pittsburgh. After the Virginians staged an unsuccessful attack on a French detachment, the French countered with an assault on Fort Necessity, trapping Washington and his soldiers inside. After a third of them died in the fighting, Washington surrendered. The clash marked the beginning of the French and Indian War.

**From: Green, et al, *The American Tradition*, 1986**

To prevent English intrusion into the Ohio Valley, the French, who also claimed the area, began to build a series of forts between Lake Erie and the Allegheny River. The British government, in retaliation, instructed colonial governors to use force if necessary to stop the French. Acting on these instructions, Governor Rorer Dinwiddie of Virginia sent George Washington, then 21 years old, to warn the

French against trespassing on British territory. The French, however, refused to withdraw. Washington, along with the small party that had accompanied him, returned to Virginia.

Dinwiddie responded to news of the French rebuff by sending out a small work detail to build a fort at the junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, commonly called “the forks of the Ohio.” In February 1754, Washington was sent with a larger force to occupy the post. Before Washington could arrive, however, the French seized the site and began building Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

In the meantime, Washington continued moving toward his destination. On May 28, 1754, near Great Meadows (Uniontown, Pennsylvania), Washington’s force surprised and defeated a small party of French. This was the first battle of the French and Indian War.

George Washington was in western Pennsylvania, preparing for a French counterattack. He ordered his troops to build a stockade near the site of the recent battle. On July 3, the newly constructed Fort Necessity was besieged by 500 French soldiers and 400 Indians. Washington and the troops were soon forced to surrender.

**From: Allen and Betts, *History U.S.A.*, 1967**

**A Few Shots at a Fort.** In 1753, the royal colony of Virginia determined to halt the French advance into what is maintained was its own western territory Governor Dinwiddie chose a husky 21-year-old Virginian who knew his way around the backcountry to tell the French that they were trespassing on Virginia lands. The French haughtily rebuffed the young man, and proceeded to build Fort Duquesne at the place where the Monongahela and the Allegheny rivers join to form the Ohio – present-day Pittsburgh. The next year, commissioned a lieutenant-colonel, the youth returned, this time with 150 Virginia frontiersmen of his own choosing. But in what is now western Pennsylvania, the Virginians were trapped by a vastly superior force of French and Indians. Hastily erecting a shelter, appropriately named Fort Necessity, the young commander soon realized that this small army would be overwhelmed. After inflicting a striking defeat on the French at Great Meadows, he was forced to surrender the fort, but not his army, on July 4, 1754. The date was ominous; few times in the history of the world has there been such foreshadowing.

The shots fired at Fort Necessity began what was called, in the New World, the French and Indian War. Within two years, that war would spread to become the first war in history to be fought on five continents. Its results would give Britain the mightiest empire the world had ever know” mightier than the Romans, larger

than that of Alexander the Great. And with that victory would be sowed the seeds of rebellion that would disrupt that empire, and finally wrench from it its most valuable possession. The young six-footer who fixed those first shots at Fort Necessity was named George Washington.

**From: Fort Necessity National Battlefield, *Biography Cards*:**

[http://www.nps.gov/archive/fone/classroom/fiwar/biography\\_5th.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/fone/classroom/fiwar/biography_5th.htm)

<http://www.thehalfking.com/bk>

### ***Biography Card: Tanaghrisson - The Half King***

#### **About 1700 - 1754**

Probably born into the Catawba nation, Tanaghrisson (tan-ah-GRIS -suhn) was only a child when the French and their American Indian allies took him captive. Tanaghrisson said the French boiled and ate his father. He was adopted into the Seneca nation.

Tanaghrisson was chosen to be the Iroquois to represent and lead the American Indians in the Ohio River Valley. The British called him the "Half King" because he was a sub-chief or representative of the Iroquois leaders. He lived at Logstown (where present day Ambridge, Pennsylvania is located).

Although the Iroquois leaders wanted the Half King to be neutral he sided with the British. In 1752, the Half King advised the Virginia colony that they should build a fort or "strong House" at the Forks of the Ohio.

In 1753, a young George Washington visited Logstown. He asked the Half King to go with him to Fort LeBoeuf, where he was to deliver a message to the French ordering them to leave the area. The Half King and three other American Indians went with Washington on this trip.

In 1754, the Half King and Washington met again. On May 27, the Half King sent word to Washington that he had located the camp of some French soldiers near Washington's camp. Washington and his men walked through the dark and rainy night to the Half King's camp. There they met and talked. In the morning, Washington and the Half King surrounded the French soldiers and a fight broke out.

At the end of the skirmish, the Half King saw that the French commander, Ensign

Jumonville, was wounded. He said to Jumonville, "Thou are not dead yet my father." Then he raised his tomahawk and killed him. It was both a horrifying and symbolic act. To the Half King and his people, Jumonville represented the French in the Ohio River Valley. Killing him showed that they wanted the French to leave.

Washington asked the Half King and another leader, Queen Alliquippa, if their warriors would fight the French with him. They decided not to fight with Washington. The Half King said that he left "because Colonel Washington would never listen to them." He also did not think Washington's fort was large enough. He called it "that little thing upon the meadow."

The Half King and his people moved to central Pennsylvania. The Half King did not see much of the French and Indian War. He died in October 1754, near present day Harrisburg.

(American Indian)

### **WHO IS THE HALF KING?**

The eighteenth-century Seneca chief known as "The Half King" is a figure so obscure that no one knows his real name - it was most likely Tanaghrisson, or something close to it. Tanaghrisson stepped into American history in 1748, when the Iroquois League designated him leader of the Senecas and Delawares who had migrated to the upper Ohio valley. Ordinarily an Iroquois headman who acted as an official spokesman for the League was called a "King", but because the Ohio Indians were hunters and warriors without permanent council fire, Tanaghrisson enjoyed only an abridged authority; hence his title, "Half King." By the early 1750's English traders and French soldiers began to penetrate the upper Ohio, and the English seemed likely to threaten the autonomy of Tanaghrisson and his people the least; they also offered the most abundant trade goods for him to distribute among his followers. Thus Tanaghrisson allied himself with traders from Virginia, but he could not stop the French from building a line of forts from Lake Erie down to the Forks of the Ohio. In May of 1754, a young Lieutenant Colonel named George Washington marched several hundred troops to the area to protect Virginia's interests. The French sent Ensign Jumonville up from Fort Duquesne to warn them off. Tanaghrisson alerted Washington to the presence of a French party, guided him to their camp, and encouraged him to make a surprise attack.

Naively, Washington did just that the morning of May 28, 1754, wounding Jumonville before he could explain that he had come on a diplomatic mission. The

French called for a ceasefire and tried to parley with their assailants, but Tanaghrisson cut off the chances for a diplomatic resolution by bashing in Jumonville's skull and washing his hands in the dead man's brains. He intended to make it impossible for Washington, the Virginians, and the British empire as a whole to back out of their alliance with him, and to use Britain's strength to eject the French from his land. Tanaghrisson's calculated act triggered events that ranged unimaginably far beyond his control, however. A French counterattack quickly escalated into the French and Indian War, which spread to Europe as the Seven Years' War. By 1763 France's empire lay in ruins and Britain was in at least theoretical control of the eastern half of North America. The newly-expanded British Empire proved too unwieldy to control, however, and 13 years later George Washington would lead colonial forces against the British in a revolt that would become known as the American Revolution.

--Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War*

### ***Biography Card: Queen Alliquippa***

#### **About 1679 - 1754**

As a young woman, Queen Alliquippa (AL-uh-KWIP-uh) met William Penn. Penn was a rare leader. He truly wanted to be friends with the local American Indians. He treated them with respect and honesty. Penn made a lot of friends among the American Indian nations. Throughout her life, Queen Alliquippa was friendly to the British, perhaps because she had met with Penn.

Conrad Weiser was a man who communicated between the American Indians and the British colonist. In 1748, Weiser traveled to an American Indian village near Logstown. He met a Seneca leader named Queen Alliquippa. He reported that she ruled with "great authority."

The American Indians of the Ohio River Valley had both men and women leaders. The Europeans gave the American Indians titles of "king" and "queen." They did not get their power by inheriting it, but by their wisdom and leadership. Unlike the kings and queens in Europe, American Indian leaders did not have great wealth. James Smith wrote, "the chief of a nation had to hunt for his living, as any other citizen."

In 1749, when the French army traveled down the Ohio River, the commander,

Céleron (SEL-or-ohn) tried to meet with Queen Alliquippa. However, she and most of her people were out of town. She probably did not meet with him on purpose. The French came with many soldiers and Queen Alliquippa was friendly with the British. In fact, Céleron described her as an old woman who led her town. He also said, "She looks upon herself as a queen, and is entirely devoted to the English."

In 1753, George Washington and Christopher Gist met with Queen Alliquippa on their trip back from Fort LeBoeuf. Washington brought her presents including a blanket with ribbon around the edges that could be used as a coat. She told Christopher Gist, "that she would never go down the river Allegheny to live, except if the English build a fort, and then she would go and live there." Queen Alliquippa asked the Virginians to build a fort in her area.

Queen Alliquippa left the Forks of the Ohio when the French took control in 1754. In June of that year, she and the Half King visited Washington's camp at the Great Meadows with all of Queen Alliquippa's people. In an effort to get the warriors to stay with his army, Washington held a council.

Queen Alliquippa and the Half King decided not to fight with Washington. They moved to a trading post in central Pennsylvania. She did not live much longer. When she died in December 1754, she was probably about 75 years old.



- e. Who won the battle at Great Meadows, Washington or the French?
4. Do any of the authors express opinions, or do they stick strictly to the facts?  
How did some of the authors express their opinions in these excerpts?
5. Read the packet of materials from the Fort Necessity National Battlefield web site about Tanaghrisson, the Half-King.
- According to this material, what part did Tanaghrisson play in the events at Great Meadows in 1754?
  - Would you expect this web site to be a reliable source?
  - Do any of the textbook accounts of this event mention Tanaghrisson or his actions? Why do you think this is true?
6. What do you think really happened at the start of the French and Indian War?

Remember: If a student is taking a course in which only one of these texts is used, that becomes the “official” version of what happened, and the student probably assumes is that version of the story is the only correct one.