



*The Reluctant
Commander*

Book II of The Neophyte Warrior series

RICHARD PATTON



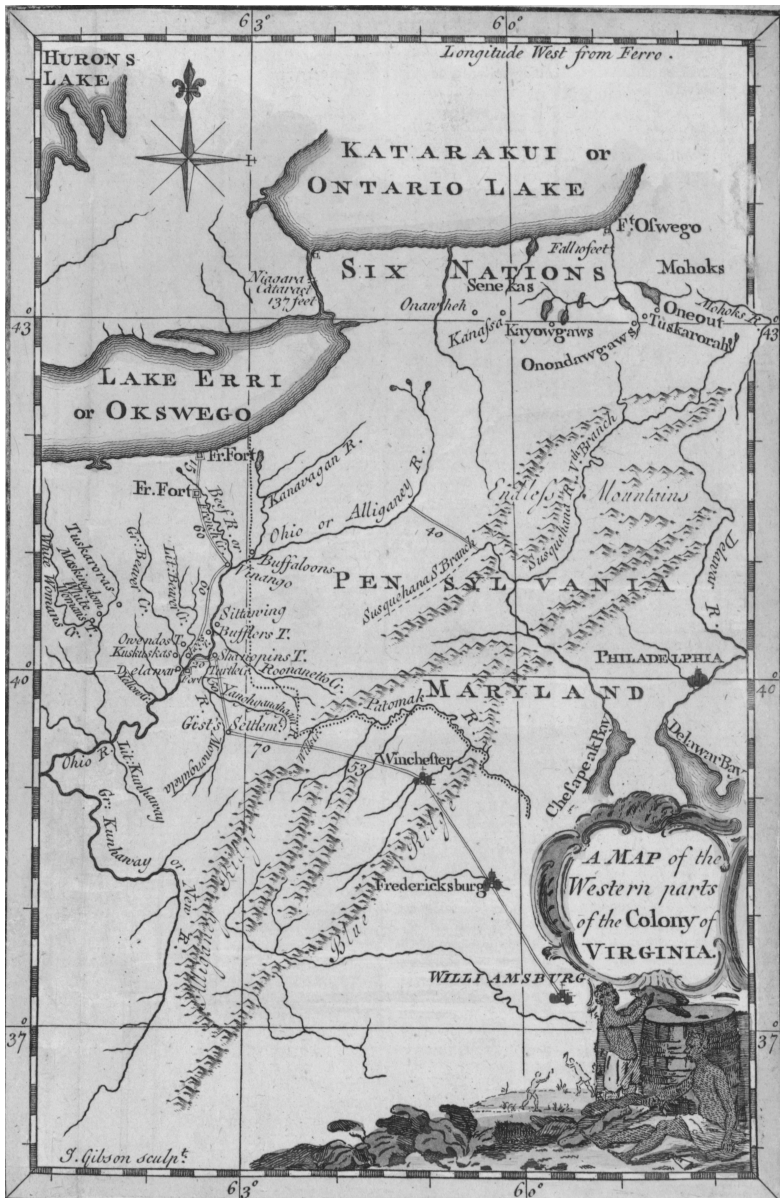
THE NEOPHYTE WARRIOR 2

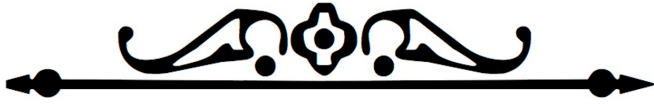
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the neophyte warrior series

His Majesty's Envoy
The Reluctant Commander
The Lion's Apprentice (2015)





THE NEOPHYTE WARRIOR 2

*The Reluctant
Commander*

RICHARD PATTON



ZUMAYA YESTERDAYS

2014

AUSTIN TX

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THE RELUCTANT COMMANDER

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*For our wonders: Tami, Letti, Stefani, Jonathan,
Steven, D.J., Dante, Dana, and Sam*

*In memory of Miss Marjorie Scott, of
Elizabeth-Forward High School, and Professor
Edwin Moseley, of Washington and Jefferson
College, who thought I could.*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of importance)

GEORGE WASHINGTON: Freshly appointed lieutenant-colonel and second-in-command of the Virginia Regiment, but the first to encounter the French.

OLD SMOKE: A Shawnee hunter of the Ohio Valley who was raised by Jesuits in Canada. His uncle Buffalo Hair considers him “too much a white man.”

PARIAH WEST/STUMP NECK: A mysterious orphan with a yearning to become a savage. A French trader named Gabriel Menard (aka Bushy Bear) and his Chippewa wife Bright Dawn teach him the ways of a shaman.

ROBERT DINWIDDIE: The Scottish Lieutenant-Governor of Virginia and an Ohio Company investor. He talks a good invasion but has not the slightest idea how to deliver one.

SARAH (SALLY) CARY FAIRFAX: The wife of George William Fairfax and the woman Washington does not know he’s in love with.

BUFFALO HAIR: Old Smoke’s uncle, a respected Shawnee sachem and dilettante psychopath. He enjoys torturing captives and owns two black slaves – a girl named Mud Face and her younger brother Deep Water.

SHORT LEG: Old Smoke’s aunt, a Shawnee matriarch.

CLAUDE-PIERRE PECAUDY, SIEUR DE CONTRECOEUR: The commander of Fort Duquesne, a decent man who enlists the aid of friendly Indians to help him butcher English settlers.

STRIKING EAGLE/SINKING CANOE: Old Smoke’s youthful best friend and a war lover.

ROBERT STOBO: A wealthy immigrant Scot and captain under Washington. He arrives at the battlefield with a horse-drawn carriage, ten servants, and a stash of Madeira wine.

TANACHARISON and MONACATOOCHA: Iroquois vice-regents to the Delaware and Shawnee in the Ohio Valley.

CHARLES "JOLICOEUR" BONIN: A youthful Parisian whom fate transforms into a French marine under Contrecoeur.

ADAM STEPHEN and **ANDREW LEWIS:** Officers under Washington, one a hot-tempered Scot, the other a bear of an Irishman.

CHRISTOPHER GIST and **JACOB VAN BRAAM:** One a frontiersman, the other a Dutchman and Virginia officer. Both are good friends of Washington.

JASPER REDFIELD: A Moravian settler in the Ohio Valley and friend of Short Leg.

JAMES MACKAY: Captain of a Carolina Independent Company and Washington's rival for battlefield command.

COULON DE JUMONVILLE: A French nobleman sent on a 'diplomatic' mission by Contrecoeur. His confrontation with Washington will be the defining event of the French and Indian War.

LOUIS ECUYER, THE SIEUR DE VILLIERS: Half-brother of Jumonville and his self-appointed avenger.

ANDREW MONTOUR: An Iroquois-French half-breed who aligns himself with the British cause.

SUMMARY

of

BOOK ONE

In Book One of the Neophyte Warrior, twenty-one-year-old George Washington enters the arcane world of British-French colonial politics with a bang *and* a whimper. Appointed Adjutant General of Virginia by Governor Robert Dinwiddie, his first act as a soldier on behalf of the British Crown—and more precisely, Dinwiddie—is to deliver a message warning the French to remove themselves from the Ohio Valley.

He does so to a Captain Joncaire at a French outpost on the Allegheny River called Venango. The French reject the ultimatum, surprising no one.

After Washington's return to Williamsburg, Dinwiddie informs the young major he is organizing a military expedition to expel the French from the Ohio Valley by force. A Virginia Regiment is to be formed and commanded by one Joshua Fry, with Washington his as second-in-command. Befitting this responsibility, the young major is promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

In the meantime, the French have been strengthening their hold on the Ohio territory. Possession of The Forks, where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio, will permit them to control the entire North American continent by linking Canada to New Orleans.

Captain Claude-Pierre Pecaudy, Sieur de Contrecoeur, leads a force of French and Indians to The Forks and drives out a small contingent of Virginians sent there by Dinwiddie to build a fort. Contrecoeur immediately begins work on his own fort, a much more substantial structure to be called Fort Duquesne in honor of the Governor-General of Canada.

While Washington and Contrecoeur lay the groundwork for a violent confrontation, the tribes of the Ohio Valley are faced with difficult decisions. Should they choose sides or ride out the impend-

ing conflict as neutrals? If they do choose, which side should it be: British or French?

The Six Nations of the Iroquois—the dominant native power—favor alignment with the British. The other tribes of the Ohio Valley—the Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo—prefer the limited French presence to the swarming British settlers, who seem always to want yet another tract of traditionally Indian land.

Trapped in this stewpot of conflict and uncertainty is a Jesuit-educated Shawnee named Old Smoke. Washington and the Shawnee meet at Venango during the Virginian's first diplomatic expedition, in which Old Smoke's services as a hunter were enlisted. After the failure of that mission, the two men went their separate ways—Washington to his uncertain fate as a military commander and Old Smoke to his village on the Ohio River.

Upon returning to his village, Old Smoke learns that his uncle Buffalo Hair, a respected Shawnee sachem with a predilection for torturing captives, wants him to enlist as a warrior with the French for the expected confrontation with the British. Old Smoke promises to consider his uncle's request then learns from his aunt Short Leg that Buffalo Hair plans to butcher a young Ojibwa captive named Cornpicker. Working clandestinely with his aunt, Old Smoke removes Cornpicker from his uncle's clutches and takes him to the fortress settlement of one of Short Leg's acquaintances, a Moravian named Jasper Redfield.

Lurking behind the scenes of overt conflict are more sinister developments—massacre and mayhem on the frontier. Bands of roving renegades, many of them commanded by French officers, mercilessly attack white settlements, sending streams of refugees fleeing over the mountains to the east. One such band, composed of Indians and French *coureurs de bois*, is led by Stump Neck, a white man turned outlaw.

In reality, Stump Neck is a young mentally disturbed orphan named Pariah West who was also with Washington at Venango but mysteriously disappeared on the return trip. A Frenchman named Gabriel Menard and his wife Bright Dawn found West with a band of Chippewa and trained him in the ways of a shaman. After the training was completed, Menard stayed on as Stump Neck's contact with the French at Fort Duquesne, thinking that, by doing so, he could exercise a degree of control over the madman.

Bright Dawn was not as optimistic. She was convinced Stump Neck would eventually kill her husband and told him so.

As Book Two begins, the French have seized the forks of the Ohio without firing a shot and, by doing so, gained control of the waterways accessing most of North America. But the matter is by no means settled. It cannot be — the stakes are too high.

Washington sets out with a regiment of Virginians and expects to join forces with another contingent of Virginians and a regiment of North Carolina Independents at a place called Great Meadows in the Allegheny Mountains. Through their Indian spies, the French are well informed of the invasion and prepare accordingly.

Something is bound to happen.

CHAPTER 1

April 20, 1754

Wills Creek, Maryland

*T*HE MAN'S NAME WAS HEZEKIAH BENNETT, AND HE WAS A RARITY — A Wills Creek farmer who had something to sell to George Washington.

"Ya want 'er, Colonel? She's a good animal, make good eatin'," the man gummed as he gestured at the cow.

Bennett had one blackened tooth and a head full of knotted, disheveled hair he must have trimmed with a hatchet. The tooth grew from the upper gum and was visible between the man's meaty lips even when they were closed. When they were open and speaking, the tooth was a distraction.

Lieutenant-Colonel Washington of the Virginia Regiment found himself watching its trajectory, steeling himself for the gush of blood that must certainly issue forth when the tooth punctured the pulpy flesh of the lower lip. To say the man was dirty was to grossly understate his condition and defame soil. He was one with his environment, patches of which covered his skin, his beard, his shoes, his burlap leggings, his (white?) shirt, and the ridiculous red sock he wore on his head.

From the stench, it was clear the environment he carried with him included more than just soil — some of it had recently departed the

intestinal tract of a living creature, possibly the emaciated Holstein standing next to the man, munching the dead grass clumped in the recently thawed mud and leaning against the three-wheeled wagon attached to a swayback gray mare.

"The cow is nearly dead, Mr. Bennett," Washington said from behind the table at which he and Captain Peter Hogg sat. "It can hardly stand."

"Well, whaddya think I'm sellin' 'er fur?" Hezekiah Bennett argued, honestly indignant. "If she was still a good milker, I'd be a-keepin' 'er. 'Sides, it don't matter if she keels over right here, right now. Save ya the trouble o' killin' 'er."

Washington looked at the cow and feared for its life.

"Sir, I am a farmer myself, and that cow looks sick to me."

"She ain't sick. She's jes' old, like me!" The man cackled, an action accompanied by an unsightly baring of tobacco-stained gums.

Washington resigned himself to the sale—he needed the cow to feed his troops. Governor Dinwiddie's assurance to his commissary, John Carlyle, that "provisions are plenty in the back country" had proven to be remarkably naive. No supplies from Carlyle or any other source had arrived in Wills Creek, and Washington now had a hundred-sixty men to feed after picking up Adam Stephen and his small company in Winchester.

"How much do you want for her?" he asked reluctantly.

Hezekiah gave an appropriately contemplative performance, rubbing his chin and nibbling at his lower lip with the obnoxious tooth.

"Five bucks. That oughta do it," he said finally.

The "buck," or one fall buckskin, was the unofficial unit of frontier currency.

"Five..." Washington stammered. "That cow is not worth one shilling."

"I'll throw the wagon in free."

"The wagon has only three wheels. And they aren't round."

Seller and potential buyer surveyed the wagon. The cow, seemingly content, was still leaning against it. Or vice-versa—it was hard to tell which. Made of planks nailed and strapped together, the wheels were ovals with flat spots where the weakest wood fibers had worn away with use.

Bennett was aghast with indignation.

"Ain'cha got no carpenters in this here army o' yers? All ya need is one more wheel!"

Of the hundred-and-sixty men in the expedition, Washington classified four as carpenters mainly on the basis of their skills with an ax. Constructing a wheel would be a real challenge for these tree-cutters.

He was not sure with whom he should be more upset—the comfortable, apathetic colonials on the Atlantic coastal strip, whose reluctance to serve had made it necessary to sign up reprobates, or the stubborn, ungovernable, uncooperative malcontents like Hezekiah Bennett who had fled to the western side of the Alleghenies to escape the burdens of civilization.

“I’ll give you one buck, and I don’t want the wagon,” was his counter-offer.

But Hezekiah Bennett was in a dickering mood.

“Why, Colonel, I’d jes’ as soon feed that ol’ cow to m’ wife ’n kids as sell her to ya at that price. A man’s gotta live, ya know. Gotta feed his fam’ly.”

Bennett topped off his homily with a grin that could have been interpreted as either smug or nonchalant.

The young Virginian wondered what kind of woman would permit her man to appear in public in such a wretched condition then decided he did not really care to know. He looked from the corner of his eye at Captain Hogg, whose narrowed lips were mouthing the word *two*. A glance at Christopher Gist and Jacob Van Braam, who seemed to be enjoying his interplay with Bennett, confirmed Hogg’s judgment.

“Two, then,” Washington offered.

“Sold!” Bennett crooned gleefully, pounding the table with one fist. “Hah...Hah, y’ve made yerself a good deal, Colonel. She’ll be good eatin’, that cow, good eatin.’”

Captain Hogg stood and counted out the monetary equivalent of two bucks to Hezekiah Bennett, who stuffed it in one pants pocket and departed with the swayback mare and the three-wheeled wagon. Washington noted Bennett chose to mount the mare rather than ride in the wagon whose ovoid wheels were so seldom in phase the bed bobbed and weaved like a rowboat in a stormy sea.

He snorted displeasure for Hogg’s benefit, not because the captain was the source of his frustration but because he needed something or someone to snort at.

The expedition to the forks had all the portents of a disaster in the making. Not only had he been unable to recruit any but the refuse of Virginia society but, possessing only two wagons and facing

the floods and muck of spring, he had been unable to travel more than four miles a day. At Winchester they had arrived exhausted and hungry to find Adam Stephen and the men he had recruited but none of the promised supplies, neither Carlyle's provisions nor Trent's packhorses. They had been forced to impress into service horses, vehicles and food from the local farmers, an activity that did not contribute to the popularity of either George Washington or the expedition.

The next eighty miles to Wills Creek had been worse, with the steep grades of the looming Alleghenies and dense thickets of mountain laurel to hack through adding to the already substantial transport problems. Carlyle's horn of backwoods plenty was a myth. That, or the proprietors of this abundance were keeping it for themselves.

To add to an already acute situation, a rider from Captain Trent brought the distressing news that eight hundred French troops could arrive at the forks at any moment and would Colonel Washington please make a brisk march over the Alleghenies to save the day.

But at Wills Creek, as at Winchester, there were no packhorses nor anything with which to equip the regiment or the expedition it served.

While he waited for the expedition's commander, Joshua Fry, to arrive with the other half of the Virginia Regiment, Washington had decided to approach local farmers like Hezekiah Bennett for supplies, but they had little and sold less. On this part of the frontier, they seemed to be little more than a race of near-barbaric malcontents with no allegiance to the Crown, Virginia, or anything but themselves.

This was no way to run a military campaign.

"Sir, should I close down for the day? There are no more farmers."

It was Hogg. The captain looked old, tired, and discouraged as he closed his orderly book, a feeling Washington certainly shared.

"Yes, I suppose so. Peter, we still have a few hours of daylight. Have the officers and subalterns come to my tent —"

"Rider approaching!"

He was coming at a good pace from the west, over a small ridge framed by a blurred orange end-of-the-day sun. He was without coat or hat; only a white shirt protected him from the misty, chilling rain and moderate winds. As he approached, Washington thought he recognized the lanky, sinuous figure of Ensign Edward Ward.

His heart sank. Ward was supposed to be at the forks completing Fort Prince George.

The rider — it *was* Ward — dismounted; his horse was covered by a meringue of perspiration. He gasped for breath and strode directly to Washington.

“Colonel Washington, I have to speak with you, sir,” he said between wheezes. “The French have taken Fort Prince George!”

Anticipating the news, Washington’s pot had already begun to boil. He paced and stomped his feet in consternation.

“Damn, damn, double damn,” he muttered then took the tricorne from his head and pounded the table with it. “Sonofabitch, son-ofabitch...son-of-a-bitch!” he railed with rising intensity as he beat the hat into a shapeless hulk. At the final imprecation, he flung the corpse in a trajectory he thought to be random, but which happened to intersect the udder of Bennett’s cow. The animal gave a start and a woeful “Mooooo!”

When he realized what he’d done, Washington apologized.

“Sorry, old girl, I didn’t mean to...”

Gist, Ward, Hogg, Van Braam, and the several militiamen present broke into an uproar.

“Do you feel better, George, now that you’ve taken your anger out on this poor cow’s teats? How cruel, how cruel!” Christopher Gist chided.

The colonel acknowledged his foolishness with a snicker but was not mollified. He retrieved the tricorne, considered putting it back on, but, given its miserable condition, rejected the idea.

“No, I don’t feel better,” he moaned. “How can I feel better? On what basis am I to make a sensible decision about this...this abominable news from Ensign Ward?”

“I have no supplies, no pack horses, no information save his dismal report, and an under-strength force of men who don’t even know how to march, let alone shoot at the enemy. I can’t inform my commanding officer because I have no idea where he is or when he’ll arrive, but I do know there are a thousand Frenchman out there ready to blow my head off —”

“More like six hundred,” Ward interjected. “and half as many Indians.”

In his tirade, Washington had completely forgotten about Ward. He sat down behind the table at which he’d parleyed with Hezekiah Bennett, laid the tricorne on it, and leaned back in his chair.

“All right, Mr. Ward, let’s listen to what you have to say. What’s your assessment of the situation? Where is John Frazier, by the way? I thought he was your superior officer.”

Ward told Washington of Frazier's absence and the reason for it—to attend to his business interests at Turtle Creek. The ensign was disturbed by this. So was Washington, at first, until Ward mentioned the denunciation of the Ohio Company as the root of all evil by Captain Contrecoeur, the commander of the new French fort to be built at the forks.

Then Washington remembered his own interest in the company might be perceived—had already been perceived by some—as a conflict of interest. He would have to work that out in his mind later.

Ward continued unabated.

"We had no chance, sir. If we'd had the troops to man the fort we might've given them a fight, even without the cannons. But there were only thirty-five of us, not enough to hold off six hundred."

"It's good you stayed the course, Ensign," Christopher Gist offered with his usual aplomb. "It should help to keep our Indians loyal."

"The Half-King was pretty mad, sir."

"And he'll be mad for a while," Gist replied. "But I think he'll stay with us...unless we have a real disaster."

Puzzled by Gist's afterthought, Washington cast a furtive glance at the guide, hoping his words were not intended as a prophecy of things to come. But Gist was blank-faced, as usual.

"Peter, have the officers come to my tent in an hour," Washington said to Hogg. "We need to talk further with Ensign Ward and have a council of war."



So that all would be comfortable, the war council was held in the clearing adjacent to the tents occupied by Washington, Gist and Van Braam. Night had fallen, and the rain-mist had mercifully subsided. A campfire of damp logs burned steadily but not flagrantly in the center of the clearing.

The remaining members of Trent's command—the soldiers, the artisans, the carpenters—filtered into camp and collectively resigned. At least, most of them did, as building fortresses in godforsaken places and being captured by the French was not their idea of the good life.

Then came the settlers, some on horseback, some in wagons, some on foot with their possessions bundled on their backs, all of them

hungry, weary portraits of dejection. It was a sorry procession, a funeral without a body to inter. The corpse — Fort Prince George — was being buried by the French.

The colonials and their Indian allies ringed the campfire, although they did not know it, much as the tribal delegates had surrounded Contrecoeur's council fire in Venango. It was, of course, a smaller circle, and the occasion demanded less formality. Tanacharison was seated on Washington's left; he and his Mingo warriors had arrived shortly after Ensign Ward. All the Virginians, militiamen and civilians, were in wilderness garb, none of it military issue. The young colonel was attired in a simple buckskin shirt, breeches and boots.

While the mood of those straggling in from the frontier was one of pessimism, the attitude at the council was businesslike. They had to decide what was to be done.

"Gentlemen, may I have your attention," Washington said as he came out of his tent carrying a short-legged stool. While the others downed their last brew or stated their final opinion, he placed the stool on the ground and sat on it, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

"I think you all know what has happened. Fort Prince George has been captured by the French, and we must decide whether to proceed with this mission or to abort it. If it is decided we will continue, it must be planned very carefully."

"Sir, how many men do the French have?" asked a voice accented with skepticism.

Washington searched for Abner Singleton, one of Ward's men who, happily, had not been part of the resignation *en masse*. He found the man on his right.

"Sergeant, how many did you say — six hundred French marines and three hundred Indians?"

"Yes, sir, that's as many as I saw."

"Could there be more at Venango?"

"Surely."

Washington waited for further comments, but none was immediately forthcoming. He brought his hands to his eyes and rubbed them. A headache was starting to take hold.

"Gentlemen, I think none of you will be surprised to learn this is a situation I never wanted to be in."

Subdued, nervous laughter.

Lowering his hands, Washington blinked, gazed at the confused-but-eager souls in his charge, and continued.

"As you know, this expedition was put together hastily, and I think you can see now why there was so much emphasis on speed. Well, we hurried, and we didn't make it. So be it. Amen.

"But now, we have to face the consequences of all that haste. We have almost eight hundred troops, but only a hundred-sixty of them are here. That's us. The rest—Colonel Fry's two companies, the reinforcements from Maryland, North Carolina, and New York, and whatever Cherokees Governor Dinwiddie has scared up—are God knows where."

As he spoke, Washington glanced at Tanacharison to make sure he was not moving too fast for John Davison's translation and to gauge the Half-King's reaction. He was rewarded for his trouble with a vacant stare.

"Fortunately, we have the Half-King and his Mingo warriors with us," the colonel said, nodding in Tanacharison's direction. "I have spoken at length with Tanacharison and can tell you that he is anxious for us to push on and to engage the French. He and his people are very distressed that Captain Contrecoeur and his army have taken the forks and Fort Prince George. But he is satisfied that, given the circumstances, we did as much as we could to oppose the invasion."

The Half-King's true opinion was somewhat less charitable, but the old man would go along with the half-truth for the sake of morale. Thank God for Ensign Ward.

"I've given it a good deal of thought, and I must say I tend to agree with Tanacharison, in part at least. I think we must push on to Redstone Creek on the Monongahela then give our wayward forces the opportunity to catch up. This is what we've been ordered to do. If we simply wait here or return to Winchester, we might well be ceding to Captain Contrecoeur and his forces the valuable time they need to build their fort and establish themselves.

"Should our reinforcements be delayed or should Colonel Fry decide to abort the mission, nothing will be lost except a little time and a few inches to our waistlines."

"When are we gonna eat that damned cow ya bought, Colonel?" someone teased from the back. "Better eat 'er soon, or she'll get so skinny she won't be worth chawin' on."

There was genuine laughter. With all that had happened, they still had some spirit left, bless their shiftless, malcontented souls!

"Actually, I was thinking of making her our mascot," Washington told them, to a chorus of jeers and whistles.

He rose to his feet; the stool was too small for his broad posterior to rest on comfortably for any length of time.

"Colonel, I beg to differ," a quiet but firm voice spoke out. The darkness prevented Washington from seeing the man, but he recognized the grating voice of Silas Hobbs, a veteran.

"Speak up, Silas. I'm listening."

The older man hesitated, selecting his words, then spoke his piece.

"Y've already said this mission was put together too fast. I'd agree with that a hunderd percent. Maybe if we could've got there first it'd be worth the rush, but we didn't. We got no food or pack horses, but what we do have is a huge, hairy mountain or two to cross an' all of them frog-eaters in front of us. I think we oughta sit down for a time an' figure out what we're doin'."

It was the kind of reasoned, sensible argument Washington would have expected from Silas. In fact, he agreed with it.

"Silas, I appreciate your opinion. I've gone over the same ground a hundred times myself. But I have to remind you that Governor Dinwiddie gave us orders to take and hold the forks and, if necessary, throw the French out—"

"Colonel, the governor is a dear, dear man, but he don't know what the hell he's talkin' about. He's a Scotsman, for pity's sake. Sure, he knows what a mountain looks like, and maybe he's seen a tree or two in his day, but not in the kind of bunches we're gonna have to push through between here an' the Ohio. An' I know for sure he never got himself knotted up in a thicket of laurel slick!"

The colonel contributed a few belly laughs to Silas's gnarly verbiage, as did everyone but the Half-King, whose understanding of English, even with the benefit of translation, was limited.

"Well, Silas, God knows we've hacked through laurel slick before, and we *will* be sitting down to figure things out with our colleagues when they arrive. I'll promise you one thing, though. If Colonel Fry says we go back, I surely will not make a fuss about it."

He heard a surly grumble from Silas's direction.

"Come on, Silas," Washington teased. "I don't know what you're worried about. A hundred-sixty Englishmen with a cow for a mascot ought to be able to lick a thousand frog-eaters, don't you think?"

The guffaw from Silas was rich and resonant.

"Make that a hundred-an'-sixty *Americans*," he corrected. "I don't see no Englishmen here!"

The remark elicited another hefty chorus, this time of cheers and applause, which surprised the colonel. Many of the more boisterous revelers were Scots immigrants; he had often noted that the officer corps of the Virginia militia seemed to be dominated by Scotsmen of one stripe or another. Some came from the ranks of the vanquished of the 1745 Jacobite revolt against the British Crown, others from the legions of ambitious Scots seeking their fortunes in the colonies. Hogg, Stobo, Stephen, and even the regiment's physician, Surgeon-Major James Craik, were Scots.

What the English/American distinction meant Washington didn't know. Whether he should be concerned he wasn't sure. But their laughter at Hobbs's dig at the English was heartier than most. Maybe it was just their way, maybe not. And he found himself strangely pleased by the reaction.

He was ready to call an end to the council; most of the men were rising and stretching anyway. Silas had already provided closure. Instead, he simply announced, "We'll pull out day after tomorrow. That'll give us time to pack and maybe let our friends catch up. Captain Hogg will organize the departure."

After telling Hogg, Gist, and Van Braam he wanted to meet with them at breakfast to discuss the schedule and the best route to take, Washington approached the departing Ensign Edward Ward and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Edward, I'd like to see you about nine tomorrow morning. I know you've told us what happened, but we need to understand the details and get them down on paper."

"Certainly, sir. I'll be here," Ward replied nodding, his long neck and head two inches above Washington's line of sight. "Oh, did I tell you what the French are calling their fort?"

"No."

"They're calling it Fort Duquesne, after the Governor General of Canada. Captain Contrecoeur told me at dinner. He seems a decent sort, the French Captain..."

Not knowing where to take it, Ward let the thought trail off. He saluted and left, as did the remainder of the officers in short order.

Entering his tent, the colonel lighted the lamp on the table next to his cot. Then he found a mug, went back outside, and poured a modicum of rum into it from a keg near Van Braam's tent next door. He sipped it thoughtfully for a while, considered and forsook mak-

ing an entry in his journal, finished off the rum with a flourish, and prepared for sleep.

As he lay, quietly letting the rum do its magic, he rummaged through his mind's record of events, sifting and sorting, trying to impose order on chaos. Some thoughts drifted, wanting to become dreams.

Are you there, Sally? he asked.

Of course I am, George, she replied.

In his dreams, she was not another man's wife, and they loved openly.

Everything will be resolved when Joshua Fry comes, his own image insisted, oblivious to the abrupt and illogical shift of topic. I'll inform him of the situation, he'll give me my orders, and I'll obey them.

But where is Joshua Fry? the image rudely demanded, looking thoroughly perplexed.

CHAPTER 2

May 12, 1754

The Forks of the Ohio

IT WAS AN EXCELLENT VANTAGE POINT, THIS HIGH HILL ON THE SOUTH bank of the Monongahela where it met the Allegheny and made the Ohio. It was *more* than an excellent vantage point, Peter Delaney concluded; it was a looking glass onto an inexpressibly lovely panorama of green valleys, rolling hills, and quietly but tenaciously flowing rivers.

A woman, a lady, like Ireland. Except for the dense forestation and the chronic overcast, it might have been Ireland. But the trees. Delaney swore under his breath. There are just too damned many of them, although taken one at a time they can be pretty things.

As he squinted, one eye closed so the other could sight through the telescope, the émigré from the Emerald Isle complained – perhaps to God – that the scene would be even more picturesque if the four-pointed star that was the genesis of Fort Duquesne had not been branded on its face.

Delaney removed the telescope from his eye and handed it to the other Half-King, Monacatoocha, on his right. Tanacharison and Monacatoocha shared the responsibility of Iroquois rule over the two dominant Ohio Valley tribes; Tanacharison was the Half-King of the Delaware, Monacatoocha the Half-King of the Shawnee.

"Take a look, Chief," said the Irishman, stretching and sucking in the cool morning air of spring. Delaney, a barrel-chested, pale-skinned version of his immediate superior, Christopher Gist, had visited the site a week earlier and found the militiamen and the Indians constructing the English fort to be in "high spirits." The French Fort Duquesne would dwarf the now-defunct Fort Prince George; this did not inspire a mood of celebration in Delaney, Monacatoocha, or the small party of Virginians and Iroquois he and Gist had brought with them.

With the same, unwavering countenance Tanacharison had exhibited at Venango, the Oneida chieftain took the telescope, but resolve behind his face was not in evidence. At Venango, the French had been the enemy. Delaney and the British were allies. They were in charge.

Monacatoocha knew they had to be in charge, but he did not like it. This was partly because he suspected the British of incompetence, and partly because, as an Iroquois sachem, he was not comfortable relinquishing control. Once waived, power would not be easily regained. Recognizing the weakness of this position, he decided to present a fatalistic visage to his colonial partners. It would be a grudging amiability he displayed, but it would not be mistaken for servility.

Unfamiliar with the device, Monacatoocha struggled with it and, after the Irishman had told him to close the eye not pressed to it, was awed by what he saw. Excitedly, he angled it from one position to another, finally settling on a line of sight intersecting the forks. For nearly a minute, he stood with one foot poised on a boulder, staring through the telescope. Then he returned it to Delaney.

"This is nice," he said.

"It is that," said Delaney. "Would you like one?"

"Yes."

Delaney put the eyepiece in place again and aimed the telescope at the embryo of Fort Duquesne.

"I'll see if I can get you one in Williamsburg," he said, then chastised himself for conducting business in the middle of a crisis. Buying and selling was an ingrained habit with traders, one difficult to break.

"What do you think of the French Fort?" he asked.

Monacatoocha spread his arms to indicate great size.

"Big," he said. "Bigger than yours."

"It is big," Delaney acknowledged then said, with a smile and an assurance he did not feel, "When we capture this one, we'll make the next one even bigger."

The Oneida chieftain did not respond, just regained the telescope and continued to amuse himself.

"Do you see those four areas shaped like arrowheads on the corners of the big square?" Delaney asked. "Those will be the bastions, where they'll mount their cannon."

Monacatoocha nodded his understanding and handed the telescope back. Sighting through it, the Irishman studied the construction activities. On two sides of the square that roughly paralleled the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, men were setting ten- to twelve-foot pickets. A stocky officer with pince-nez glasses supervised the construction of the two remaining walls, where horizontal squared timbers were being laid to protect against a landward attack.

In front of the land side walls, a squad of mixed French and Indian laborers were digging, their bodies caked with a turbid concoction of sweat and grime. There were now two docks—the original landing upstream of the fort on the Allegheny, around which most of the two hundred canoes and bateaux of Contrecoeur's invasion fleet were still clustered, and a new one near the point of convergence of the two rivers. A trench road connected the second dock to the thirty- or forty-foot-long stockade wall, or curtain, between the north and west bastions.

Giving the telescope back to Monacatoocha, Delaney pointed to the eastern side of the fort and said, "Take a look where the two heavy walls are goin' up, Chief. D'you see those boys with the picks and shovels?"

Monacatoocha squinted, adjusted the telescope, and gave an affirmative grunt.

"That's the side we'll be comin' at 'em from—the east—so those are the two sides they need to be the thickest and the strongest. What them boys are diggin' down there is a trench so that anyone approachin' those two walls'll get theirselves trapped. Makes it a lot easier shootin' someone if he's stuck in a ditch with no cover. Might even put water in there so whoever don't get shot'll be drowned like a rat."

The old man's attention switched from the scene below to Delaney. The burly trader smiled to show he was joking and slapped his companion on the back. Monacatoocha returned the grin and

ignored the slap, not quite understanding what was supposed to be funny. Then he went back to the more obvious charms of the telescope.

"No need to worry, Chief. It'll be a tough nut to crack, that fort, but if Colonel Fry gets here real quick, it won't be so bad. Might even be worth thinkin' about a seaside assault against them two flimsier walls," Delaney prattled, having only a vague idea of what he was talking about but keenly aware of his de facto status as advocate of the British cause.

Monacatoocha gave a sudden start, straightened, and peered with heightened intensity at the action below.

"What is it, Chief?" Delaney asked, curious.

Monacatoocha transferred the telescope to the Irishman.

"Soldiers," he said.

Delaney looked and saw forty or fifty marines in French wilderness garb assembling by the upstream dock. There were two officers—one short, young, and in the same attire as the soldiers, the other tall, middle-aged, and wearing a *Compagnies franches* captain's uniform.

"They look like they're goin' somewhere, Chief. Did you pick out the officers?"

"Yes, they are the ones telling the others what to do," Monacatoocha said stiffly, mildly insulted that Delaney had so little regard for his ability to assess the enemy. "The short one will go with the soldiers. The tall one is Contrecoeur. He will stay."

The Irishman had forgotten that the Oneida chieftain had met Contrecoeur but was nevertheless impressed by the identification.

"Good eye, Chief." He winked. "You say the tall one with the uniform is Contrecoeur? Wouldn't be any sense him goin' out, now, would there?"

Delaney resumed his survey of the small triangle of land he had come to think of as "the point." Most of the marines were either milling around or standing at ease, but some sort of dispute had arisen among the Indians. A tall, bare-chested one with a long scalplock and black paint on his face was making a fuss. He seemed to be angry about something and was vigorously making his complaints known to an elderly sachem.

The two French officers soon spied the commotion and came to the aid of the elderly man. Delaney giggled.

"Chief, look at the big one stompin' his feet an' jumpin' up an' down by the officers," he said. "What do you make of that?"

Monacatoocha looked.

"I saw him and the old one at Venango. They are Shawnee," he said, almost sadly.

"Well, you should know your Shawnee," Delaney said as he placed the telescope in its case and headed away from the promontory toward camp. "Right now, we need to get to Colonel Washington an' tell him there's a company of frog-eaters comin' to greet him."

"Will you tell him he must attack before the French fort is finished?" Monacatoocha asked pointedly.

"Chief, I can't tell him to *do* anything. All we can do is tell him what we seen," Delaney explained patiently.

The Oneida chieftain's face could not have expressed greater concern if his anxiety had been transformed into pigment and painted on his face. He grasped Delaney's shoulder and brought the trader to a halt.

"I do not want to attack that fort," he insisted, poking his free arm in the direction of the point. "Too many of us will die."

"I don't want to attack it either, Chief." Delaney sighed, shrugging fatalistically. "Believe me, there are things I'd rather do."



Striking Eagle was livid with rage and would not submit to the pleas from Eye-That-Winks that he settle down and behave reasonably. So, he paced and fretted and snorted and scowled for all to see, including the cluster of French marines being assembled to meet the enemy, if *enemy* was the right word for a peacetime confrontation.

It would be an exaggeration to say that all eyes were on him. Only about half were, including those of Eye-That-Winks, whose frustration showed in his folded arms, pursed lips, and rapidly fluttering eyelid. Had Eye-That-Winks been a white man, he might not have put up with the tantrum, but as a Shawnee he was bound by Shawnee custom to tolerate spirited behavior in young men, even though he considered this a little beyond the accepted norms.

"I have been digging and shoveling ten days for these stupid Frenchmen," Striking Eagle huffed. "I have set their poles in the ground. I have lifted their rocks. I have carried their water — to them I am a horse. That's how they think of me — a horse, to be whipped and prodded, nothing more."

"They have not whipped and prodded *you*, Striking Eagle," moaned Eye-That-Winks as the peevish youth circled behind him on another of his frantic forays.

Being foisted on his own hyperbole only infuriated Striking Eagle more.

"But I have worked hard for these Frenchmen," he shouted, gesticulating wildly. "They should let me go with them to kill the Englishmen. They told us we could fight the English if we joined them. They did not say they would make slaves of us!"

Eye-That-Winks considered pointing out to his youthful colleague that Striking Eagle could leave anytime he wanted to and was not, therefore, a slave. But he feared the rash youngster would do just that—leave—and decided against it.

While he was considering another, less provocative approach to take with the young giant, he spied Captain Contrecoeur and the shorter-by-a-head commander of the assembled military force approaching. He had not met the smaller man but could see by the glow on his plump cheeks that he, too, was relatively young.

"What's the matter, Eye-That-Winks?" Contrecoeur asked.

Eye-That-Winks steeled himself for a lengthy explanation, sighed, and said, "He wants to—"

"Oh, excuse me, Eye-That-Winks, this is Ensign Coulon de Jumonville, one of our best officers. Ensign, this is my friend Eye-That-Winks. He and his Shawnee brethren have joined forces with us."

The two men shook hands and exchanged pleasantries. With his diminutive stature, a compressed grin supported by apple-rosy cheeks, and the hood of his uniform framing his face, Jumonville's appearance was distinctly elfin. By contrast, the impression projected by the other young man present, Striking Eagle, was that of a bear whose honey tree has been chopped down—a murderous, un-directed rage against all potentially guilty parties.

With the approach of Contrecoeur and Jumonville, Striking Eagle had drifted away and was now standing on the dock with a pervasive sulk possessing his body and soul. At least he has the good sense to let me deal with the French, Eye-That-Winks thought.

"Striking Eagle thinks he should be allowed to go with the ensign," Eye-That-Winks explained. "He wants to fight Englishmen."

Contrecoeur glanced from Eye-That-Winks to Striking Eagle and back again, perplexed.

"But didn't you tell him this is not a military mission but a diplomatic one? Ensign Jumonville will be delivering a message to the British warning them to remove themselves from these lands, nothing more."

Eye-That-Winks knew the mission's purpose and was privately mystified by the French and British practice of sending the youngest and least experienced among them on critical diplomatic errands. But he would not mention his misgivings. It was not his business to tell the French their business.

"I told him, but he still wants to go. He thinks there will be fighting. He has convinced himself the British are devils and will attack."

The Shawnee sachem tried to make his exposition a simple statement of fact, but his true opinion of Striking Eagle's behavior must have shown through, because a nascent smile began to form on Contrecoeur's lips.

"Let me talk to him, Eye-That-Winks," the Frenchman said. "Call him over."

Eye-That-Winks waved for Striking Eagle to join them, which he ultimately did after demonstrating his displeasure with a series of hostile glares and defiant body language. With his scalplock wrapped in a spiral around his neck and the narrow black isthmus of his nose bridging the twin islands of black pigment covering his lower face and forehead, Striking Eagle could, with the right attitude, have looked fierce. Instead, he came across as merely petulant.

After the young man's reluctant arrival, Contrecoeur paused for a couple of beats before speaking.

"Eye-That-Winks tells me you want to fight Englishmen, Striking Eagle. That is good. We can use a man with your enthusiasm, but this is not the right time. Ensign Jumonville's mission is a peaceful one. There will be no fighting."

After Eye-That-Winks had translated for him, Striking Eagle glanced sideways at the marines.

"They have guns," he said.

"They must have guns," the French Captain said, "as a precaution. They must be able to protect themselves if the need arises. You would not wish them to be eaten by a pack of wolves, would you?"

Striking Eagle conceded the point with a diffident shake of the head. Eye-That-Winks began to see Contrecoeur in a new light. For a military commander, the man had a surprising store of patience.

With a casual glance at Jumonville and Eye-That-Winks, Contrecoeur moved to Striking Eagle and placed his hands on the Shawnee's ample shoulders.

"Striking Eagle, you will get your chance to fight Englishmen. That is, if any of us do. But right now, what we need more than your bravery is your strong back. Fort Duquesne must be completed if we are to keep the British out, and only men like you can accomplish such a monumental task."

Eye-That-Winks looked to gauge Jumonville's reaction to Contrecoeur's finely embroidered flattery of the tall youngster. He found the young Frenchman staring back at him, making a similar appraisal.

"Why does he hate the British so?" Jumonville whispered.

The taciturn old sachem wondered if it was worth trying to explain the Shawnee temperament to a Frenchman, then said simply, "He is too young to hate. He is only practicing his hatred so it will be there when he needs it."

As Eye-That-Winks had anticipated, the answer only confused Ensign Jumonville, whose lips parted as if he meant to reply but failed to produce even a grunt. The ensign then excused himself, saluted his commander once more, and left to muster his charges.

Contrecoeur's lofty superlatives were working on Striking Eagle. No longer was he an enraged bear. He was one step down—a frustrated adolescent. Unaccustomed to speaking with strangers, let alone French captains, he unfolded his arms and let them hang by his sides as he stammered, attempting to verbalize a request.

"I...I do not want to dig anymore," he blurted meekly. "I would like to lay the logs."

Contrecoeur was overjoyed. A compromise had been reached. But Striking Eagle, pressing what he perceived to be his advantage, was not finished.

"But I would like to shoot," the young giant added, stuttering. "To practice in the evenings."

"Shoot at what?" the French captain asked, glancing at an equally dismayed Eye-That-Winks for guidance.

Striking Eagle pointed to a clan of squirrels that had taken up residence in the bush twenty or thirty meters downstream of the dock, and who were, as was their habit, presently enjoying a community swim in the Allegheny River.

"At them," Striking Eagle answered.

The captain turned and saw the rodents, and could not imagine anyone wanting to shoot them, even for food. The swimming squir-

rels, as they had come to be known, were a new phenomenon to the marines and officer corps. The creatures' resolute indolence and love of recreation were a source of amusement and envy to the toiling soldiers. They had almost achieved the status of mascots. He was at a loss for words.

"I have not shot very much," Striking Eagle explained shyly. "I need to shoot at moving targets...so I can learn to shoot at Englishmen better."

Contrecoeur nodded, relieved. At least the request had logic to it. He had been afraid he would be faced with one of the occasional chasms between the white and Indian cultures that no amount of talk, logic, or good will could bridge.

"Striking Eagle, I have a better idea," he said, smiling up at the would-be squirrel assassin. "We have many empty wine jugs that would make fine targets. Why don't you toss them in the river and shoot them as they float by?"

The Frenchman sneaked a glance at Eye-That-Winks. Although the old man's fissured face divulged no discernible opinion, Contrecoeur sensed that he approved.

Striking Eagle thought about the offer and cast a glance of his own at Eye-That-Winks, who nodded once.

"Yes, that would be good," the tall Shawnee replied.

"You'll help us build the fort, then?" Contrecoeur asked, hoping to nail things down.

"Yes, but when you go to fight Englishmen, I go?" Striking Eagle said. It was at once a statement and a question.

He wants to nail this down, too, the French captain thought. Hesitantly, he averted his eyes and said, "Yes, you'll get your chance to kill Englishmen."

With the fires of his anger quenched by Contrecoeur's disarming civility, Striking Eagle now showed signs of embarrassment. He loped clumsily toward the brush where he'd thrown the pickax, retrieved it, and laid it on the ground in front of Contrecoeur. His face, in spite of the bear grease and charcoal smeared on it, was a portrait of humility.

"I will dig," he said forcefully. "And I will lay logs. But I will fight Englishmen." Contrecoeur was about to repeat the conditions attached to his promise when Striking Eagle hastily added, "Yes, yes, I know — only if *you* fight the Englishmen."

The bargain was punctuated by the diminutive but energetic Jumonville, who, having formed his troops for departure, returned with another brisk salute.

"We're ready to go, sir," he announced, looking from the corner of his eye at the freshly contrite Shawnee by his commander's side.

"Very good, Ensign," Contrecoeur said, saluting.

"Will the...gentleman be coming with us, sir?"

"No, Striking Eagle has decided to stay."

Although he tried to suppress outward signs of relief, a pall seemed to lift from Jumonville's disposition.

"Thank you, sir," he said, somewhat too gleefully, then rendered another smart salute. "We'll be on our way, then."

"God be with you, Ensign," Contrecoeur replied.

The French captain, the aging sachem and the young giant observed as the marines and their tribal auxiliaries boarded the canoes and bateaux. The plan was to turn the bend at the confluence of the three rivers and travel up the Monongahela as far as possible, disembark, and seek out the commander of the British forces to whom the ultimatum Contrecoeur had written would be delivered.

It will be a while before they return, Contrecoeur reflected. Something would happen; he was sure of it. One did not threaten the British Empire without expecting consequences.

"Striking Eagle, I think you will soon get your chance to fight the British. Perhaps very soon," he said almost dreamily as he watched the boats disappear from view.

Hearing no reply from the lofty Shawnee, the captain glanced in his direction. Striking Eagle stood, arms folded, as transfixed by the scene as were Contrecoeur and Eye-That-Winks. He appeared quite calm. Although his small mouth was ill-equipped for emotional display, there was not the slightest doubt he was happy.

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