

CHAPTER 1

Clash at Point Pleasant

“As Israel mourned and her daughters did weep for Saul and his hosts on the mount of Gilbo, Virginia will mourn for her heroes who sleep in tombs on the bank of the O-hi-O.”

Unknown

In the fall of 1774 the royal governor of Virginia, John Murray, Lord Dunmore, in violation of British policy and most likely for personal land acquisition, committed the backwoods militia of that province to a short, violent war with the Shawnee Indians and allied tribes, an action historically connoted as Dunmore’s War. The Boston Tea Party, so famously enacted in December 1773, had signaled the resolution of some Americans to assume control of their own affairs, particularly economic endeavors. But in the west, along the frontier, equally important were the implications of the royal proclamation of 1763, establishing demarcation boundaries along the crest of the Appalachian Mountain, separating Indian Territory from land available for colonial settlement. This attempt to separate two quarreling parties was not, however, backed by redcoat garrisons and was largely ignored by the hordes of white immigrants flocking to the frontier.

In 1768, when a treaty negotiated at Fort Stanwix realigned the 1763 demarcation boundaries between settlers and Native Americans, colonial migration westward dramatically increased, as, correspondingly, did Indian aggression. The newly aligned boundary permitted white settlers to advance adjacent to the banks of the Ohio River, further compressing the eastern Indian tribes into a region north and west of that river's great curving arc. As early as 1768, Kentucky was full of long rifle hunters who spent months obtaining deer and buffalo hides. Daniel and Squire Boone, Casper Manskat, Abraham Bledsoe, and others were attempting to homestead the area by 1773.

As British Crown officials replaced French troops in the forts of the Northwest, Indian protests of white invasion found sympathetic ears, but no military support. Displeased with this constant encroachment, several tribes formed an alliance under the leadership of the intrepid Shawnee war chief, Cornstalk, determined to resist all further white trespassing. The Miamis, Ottawas, Delawares, Wyandots, and Mingos demurred to Cornstalk's leadership, a rare coalition for tribally conscious Indians, and together they prepared to defend their bountiful Kentucky hunting grounds.

As the two implacable enemies drew closer in physical proximity, the collision of their cultural values initiated an undeclared yet open warfare, a merciless exchange of raids, assaults, and reprisals pursued by both parties to the death. Scores of Shawnee raids into the Valley of Virginia created widespread panic, initiating vociferous demands for retaliation among the immigrants. Among the most serious was an attack on the Kerr's Creek settlement in Rockbridge County led by Cornstalk himself, where dozens of settlers were slain and scores of others taken

captive. A second onslaught witnessed the slaying of John Rhodes, a respected Mennonite minister, and his ten children near present-day Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Atrocities were not, however, limited to one faction. A gruesome encounter instigated by frontier scout Daniel Greathouse and a party of white hunters occurred near Yellow Creek on April 30, 1774. Chief Logan's family was lured across the Ohio River with offers of rum, and the waiting hunters slew all who accepted, including several women. Governor Dunmore, reacting to the protestations of Indian raids while additionally acting to support Virginia's territorial rights—as well as protecting his personal land claims—called out the back country militia in July 1774. Secure in the support of frightened frontier settlers and the tacit approval of the Virginia House of Burgesses, his Lordship initiated a full-scale military campaign against the Shawnee.

The imperious, slightly overbearing, and overweight Dunmore, son of William Murray, had been appointed in 1770 governor of New York through the political auspices of Lord Gower, his wealthy brother-in-law. When Governor Berkeley of Virginia died in office that October, Dunmore was transferred to Williamsburg and appointed Virginia's royal executive, despite his initial protestations. An experienced soldier, Dunmore held the rank of captain in the Third Foot Guards and was an avid proponent of horseback racing, parties, and dancing. He and his attractive wife, Lady Charlotte Stewart, immediately became extremely popular with the socially conscious Virginians. The auburn-haired, brown-eyed Scotsman, who often donned traditional kilts, possessed all the Scotch charm and willfulness.

Enrolling his three sons at the College of William and

Mary, Murray purchased a large estate not far from the colonial capital. He, like most Crown appointees, undertook this important colonial assignment in order to augment his personal financial fortunes by acquiring valuable wilderness land tracts. Allying himself with experienced Virginia land speculators, he enlisted in several schemes designed to acquire Indian tracts quite cheaply. This nefarious participation surely influenced his decision to launch a campaign designed to break the power of the tribes along the Ohio. Dunmore justified these actions to the colonial office by suggesting that unruly frontier settlers would be easier to control—and therefore less likely to rebel against the Crown—if they were permitted to freely expand their land acquisitions at Indian expense. His approval of the restless nature, wanderlust, and greed of frontier settlers contributed to the development of a trait of frontier advancement that would reign unabated for one hundred years. But Dunmore's position would also soon relax control of the Crown on its colonial citizens, for his expansionism coexisted with increased freedom and independence.

When the British army evacuated Fort Pitt at the Forks of the Ohio River, Dunmore quietly and quickly garrisoned the critical post with Virginia militia, placing his confidant, Maj. John Connolly, in control. Connolly became the driving force in a series of adept manipulations that triggered the Indian war. He circulated a series of letters to settlers in which he warned them of expected Indian raids and advised them to “fort up” in defensible positions. These repeated alarmist announcements reinforced the general outcry for retaliation against the tribes, for settlers needed to work their fields in spring and summer rather than defend themselves in hastily constructed forts. Dunmore approved the employment

of numerous survey parties sponsored by large land companies, allowing their penetration into the tracts alongside the Ohio River. He appointed Col. William Preston, a rabid expansionist, as official surveyor for Augusta County. These surveyors, precursors of homesteading, redoubled their activity across the Ohio River in the early spring of 1774, marking tracts for future settlement, while the Shawnee watched and seethed, for they well knew the intrusion of survey parties was preparatory to an influx of migrants.

As Dunmore prepared his military campaign, he first dispatched militia major Angus MacDonald to raise a company and probe across the Ohio to measure Shawnee preparedness. MacDonald marshaled almost four hundred men under able militia captains such as Daniel Morgan and George Rogers Clark and advanced cautiously and methodically. He skirmished with a few Indians, burned several villages on the Muskingum River, and then returned without a major encounter. Most of the participating frontiersmen condemned MacDonald's incursion as ineffectual, feeling that his campaign actually strengthened the resolve of the Shawnee. Fortunately, as Dunmore continued preparations, the British Indian Department, led by the efforts of William Johnson, the northern commissioner, and John Stuart in the south, succeeded in preventing alliances between the Shawnee and the Iroquois or the Cherokee, thus preventing a general Indian war.

The cocky Virginia governor followed MacDonald's sortie with a massive two-pronged offensive utilizing almost twenty-five hundred Virginia militiamen. He ordered Col. Andrew Lewis of Big Lick (Roanoke), Virginia, to raise one thousand men from the militia of Augusta, Botetourt, and Fincastle Counties and to advance overland through some

of the most rugged country on the frontier, uniting with a second column led by Dunmore himself at the junction of the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers. The governor's contingent of fifteen hundred volunteers would be recruited from Berkeley, Frederick, Hampshire, and Dunmore Counties. His column would float down the Ohio from Fort Pitt or march along the riverbank to the proposed junction with Lewis. Once united they would cross the Ohio and advance on the Indian villages north of the river, overwhelming the tribes with numbers and destroying their fighting ability. To the amazement of the militiamen the doughty, kilted Dunmore marched alongside the ranks, shouldering his own knapsack.

In the lengthening shadows of a late October afternoon, a column of tired marchers attired in dusty, fringed hunting dress emerged from the trees along the north bank of the Kanawha River, raising an exhilarating shout upon sighting the glimmer of the Ohio River. Moving to the beat of an awkward drummer and the high, shrill squeal of fifes, which caused the birds to scatter wildly across the sky, the flower of Virginia's upland militia filed into a triangular meadow formed by the coalescence of the two rivers. Despite the undercurrent of growing dissatisfaction with Crown policies, these volunteer frontiersmen were on campaign in response to an appeal by the royal governor of Virginia.

As they settled about twinkling campfires in the chilly, moon-washed night, the marchers carefully surveyed their surroundings. A more attractive camping location could scarcely be found. Large trees, scattered parklike about the site, provided shade, while springs of cold, pure water were plentiful. The multihued leaves turning red and ochre displayed the eye-filling beauty so characteristic of an

Appalachian upland autumn. European army officers would scarcely have recognized the assemblage as a military force, for few uniforms were in evidence and discipline seemed voluntary when present at all. Most of the marchers wore long hunting shirts or frocks of heavy linen dyed to various hues with leather or woolen stockings stretched almost to the thigh over woolen shirts, pants, and moccasins. Headgear was made effectively from animal skins or knitted from wool. The firearms they so carefully protected were flintlocks, primarily the recently developed American long rifles, with a scattering of English-style muskets. From broad, beaded belts hung leather shot bags and elaborately carved powder horns. Tomahawks and scalping knives completed their armament. They moved with a carefree shuffle that was almost a swagger. So cocksure and confident were these young militiamen that commissary officer William Ingles remarked: "We looked on ourselves as in safe possession of a fine encampment and thought ourselves a terror to all the Indians on the Ohio."

This hastily organized militia army of slightly more than one thousand Virginians was led by the stout, brown-eyed Andrew Lewis, descended from Presbyterian Scotch-Irish stock. He was born in Ireland in 1720 and brought to the Valley of Virginia as a child in 1731. An experienced colonial military commander, he was one of those brave, intrepid souls who accompanied George Washington to the Forks of the Ohio and was wounded in the futile defense of Fort Necessity in 1754. Promoted to major of militia, Lewis followed dying British general Thomas Forbes on his 1758 road-building expedition, earning the thanks and appreciation of Col. Henri Bouquet, Forbes' successor. Dispatched with two hundred select riflemen to reconnoiter Fort

Duquesne with Maj. James Grant and his Highlanders, Lewis feuded constantly with Grant. He was again wounded and captured by the French when Grant's tactics fell apart, initiating a spiteful dispute between the two soldiers. Reportedly slain, Lewis was conveyed by his captors to Montreal, then on to Quebec, but proved such an intractable prisoner that he was exchanged in November 1759. Andrew Lewis was described by most who knew him well as "of reserved manners and great dignity of character, vigorous intellect, unquestionable courage, and apt to inspire confidence in those about him." His reputation as a frontier militia officer progressed as he set about the defense of isolated settlements and doggedly pursued hostile raiders. Highly authoritarian, he was respected and usually obeyed by his followers for his obvious military abilities, but his personality forbade true closeness.

Lewis's militia force was composed of landholding farmers from the back country Shenandoah Valley. These spacious yet thinly populated counties provided their citizens with freedom from the bonds of authority, encouraging the true development of Mr. Jefferson's ideal "republic of farmers; the bedrock upon which the republic should be based." Provincially absorbed in their local and personal affairs, these stout backwoodsmen were only a few generations removed from Celtic or Germanic roots, yet already they were expert hunters, skilled in the use of their long rifles and accustomed to living on the disordered borderlands of civilization where boldness and readiness to defend oneself was a way of life. Most developed a rural individualistic lifestyle supported by belief in a strong evangelical Protestant God and an equally intense distrust of any authority figure. They were almost impossible to discipline, but could prove terrible, violent, and effective

soldiers if properly motivated. Uninhibited, they replied to the war whoop of the Shawnee with the long-drawn halloo of the hunter—a precursor to the bone-chilling scream of the gray-clad followers of Jackson, Lee, and Forrest eighty-five years hence.

Col. Charles Lewis, the thirty-eight-year-old brother of Andrew, led the Augusta County Regiment, composed of fourteen companies, while Col. William Fleming, who replaced Andrew as the commander of the Botetourt Regiment, directed the contingent from Botetourt County. Col. John Field commanded an independent company from Culpeper County to which the independent companies of Captains Evan Shelby and William Russell from the Holston River were attached.

Marching in the fringed ranks were scores to whom fame and fortune would appear in the eventful days to come. Seven members of the unit would rise to the rank of general in revolutionary armies. Pvt. Samuel Barton, Capt. Thomas Posey, and dozens of others would form the backbone of Capt. Daniel Morgan's riflemen, fated to be recognized as one of the finest fighting units produced by American revolutionary armies and critical to the American defeat of Gen. John Burgoyne at Saratoga. Colonel Fleming would serve briefly as governor of Virginia and four additional state chief executives were in attendance. Young Isaac Shelby, marching in a company commanded by his father, Evan, would become the first governor of Kentucky, while John Sevier would serve Tennessee as both governor and U.S. senator. Likewise Capt. George Matthews would become chief executive of Georgia, and Capt. John Steele would hold the identical position in Mississippi. Posey would serve as governor of the Indiana Territory. Six years hence, William Campbell,

Isaac Shelby, and John Sevier, all serving as colonels, would lead the sudden gathering of mountain men who surrounded and destroyed the Loyalist legion of Patrick Ferguson atop Kings Mountain.

On August 12, Colonel Lewis conferred with his principal lieutenants, reviewed their recruiting efforts, and announced a rendezvous for September 1 at the Great Levels on the Greenbrier River, an area that Lewis had surveyed in 1754. Lewis called the meeting site (presently Lewisburg, West Virginia) Camp Union, and when he arrived several days prior to the first, he discovered an eager Augusta County Regiment already snugly encamped. Having set up lean-to shelters along the small streams, the frontiersmen smoked their pipes, swapped yarns, and impatiently awaited orders to march. Large packhorse herds, assembled under the supervision of Major Ingles, grazed peacefully in the lush savannahs along the Greenbrier River. Supplies were dispatched by wagon over Warm Springs Mountain from Staunton, Virginia, to the end of the trail. From that point all ammunition, powder, and supplies were loaded on packhorses, of which three were allotted to each company. A small herd of cattle accompanied the column, rations on the hoof. On September 6 the vanguard, the Augusta Regiment of Col. Charles Lewis, departed Camp Union accompanied by five hundred packhorses burdened with fifty-four thousand pounds of flour.

The frontiersmen, led by local expert tracker Capt. Matthew Arbuckle, slashed a wide path through the forest to Elk Creek, where they made camp and began constructing canoes. Lewis's marching orders instructed the unit to move with horses, cattle, and the main body of troops in the middle of the column while an advance guard and a

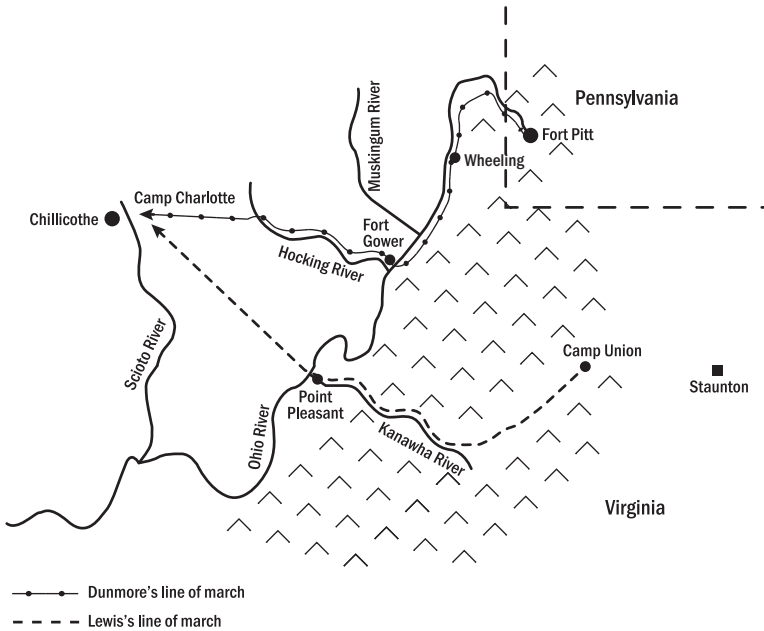
rear guard, each of two hundred men, were charged with security. A screen of individual flankers, all experienced woodsmen, encircled the entire expedition. To the amusement of the frontiersmen, fifers and drummers accompanied each regiment to relay commands, a reminder of Lewis's British military roots. If attacked, the column was to form a circle, stand fast, and await further orders. Such tactics should prevent the panic that often followed an Indian ambush.

Hacking through dense forest, the Augusta volunteers scaled steep defiles, forded fast-flowing streams, and encountered more rattlesnakes than most had previously seen. Upon reaching the bottomland at Elk Creek, the column turned downstream to a junction with the Kanawha River, near present-day Charleston, West Virginia. The exhausted Augusta riflemen paused there to rest for several days and erected a stout little blockhouse to shelter their provisions. Canoe manufacturing was hastened, for these backwoods crafts were necessary to transport heavy supplies down the wide, swiftly flowing Kanawha while the packhorses returned to Camp Union for a second load of provisions.

On September 12, Col. Andrew Lewis departed Camp Union with the second contingent of troops, composed of Colonel Fleming's Botetourt Regiment and Colonel Field's combined regiment. The bulk of Col. William Christian's Fincastle Regiment remained at Camp Union, guarding the remaining provisions until the packhorses at Elk River returned. This second column moved by a slightly different route. Unencumbered with large numbers of horses, they followed a buffalo trail for some distance, then climbed directly over the mountains to the Gauley River, moving down to the Kanawha and then continuing downstream. On

September 21 they filed, open-mouthed, past burning springs where subterranean natural gas leaked to the surface and was periodically ignited by lightning. By the twenty-third the column met Charles Lewis and his regiment at the encampment on the Elk. The soldiers completed the bark canoes as Lewis dispatched scouts to search for signs of Indians. Lewis's woodsmen found little evidence of hostiles, but Shawnees lurked nearby, shadowing the line of march and reporting each move of the "long knives" to Cornstalk.

A muster or military review was conducted on September 30 amid much shouting, culminating with the



Advance of the Virginia militia, September-October 1774. Andrew Lewis led the southern wing of the Virginia army from Camp Union (Lewisburg) to Point Pleasant, while Lord Dunmore advanced down the Ohio River from Fort Pitt with the northern wing to a planned union at Point Pleasant.

discharge of one thousand rifles, gunfire echoing from the surrounding mountainsides. In high spirits on the following day, the long files moved out of Elk Creek camp, bound for the Ohio. They followed a narrow footpath along the northeast bank of the Kanawha as the heavily laden canoes kept pace midstream. Lewis dispatched an advance company led by his son, John, and covered his right flank with another hundred-man unit. At length on October 6 the signifying shout of arrival arose as the head of the column filed from the tree line and sighted the Ohio, four hundred yards wide and flowing with a current as quiet as night. At the junction of the two streams, a meadow-like park provided an extensive view up both rivers, hence the name, reportedly endowed by frontier scout Simon Kenton, "Point Pleasant."

As the marchers prepared their mess fires on the triangular point, the stars hung so low over the Ohio River that a man seemingly could touch them. A feeling of melancholy isolation prevailed throughout the army that first night, for although their exhausting, 160-mile march was complete, their future was shrouded in mystery. Dunmore's division, expected to arrive first, was nowhere in sight and despite deep confidence in their own prowess these hardy militiamen realized they were encamped in the land of their enemies.

Dunmore had stoutly supported Virginia's claims to these western lands, arguing with representatives from Pennsylvania over the Forks area and ownership of Fort Pitt. He insisted on departing with his arm of the militia force from Fort Pitt to demonstrate Virginia's possession of this important base. Eventually the Pennsylvanians backed down before the militant Virginians, as the Indian threat brought on an uneasy truce between parties. The governor changed his strategy regularly as the campaign progressed, often based on information of dubious value.

Dunmore's indecisiveness can partially be attributed to a lack of confidence in his scouts, but Chief Cornstalk's mysterious ability to conceal his force and his true purposes amplified Dunmore's information deficiency. By late September, the governor decided to abort a direct advance to Point Pleasant, abandoning the Ohio River route in favor of striking out westward from a point higher upriver. He thus desired Lewis to proceed across the Ohio at Point Pleasant and initiate a drive west to unite with his forces.

At this juncture coordination between the two men, according to the testimony of those present in both army divisions, became extremely clouded. Just how much Dunmore's alterations of plan were actually communicated to Lewis is not determined. Statements vary, some sources claiming that notes for Lewis were left in a hollow tree while others testified to a message from Dunmore delivered by Simon Girty that so enraged Lewis he beat the messenger about the head with his walking stick. Years later a number of officers with Lewis's expedition, including his son, John, avowed that absolutely no exchange of information took place between the two men. But it seems logical to conclude that Lewis either knew of Dunmore's tactical alterations or that he deduced that some change in plan had occurred for he did not prepare to fight at Point Pleasant and seemed ready to cross the Ohio to proceed west. It's virtually impossible to further decipher the level of communication between the two, except to determine it was far less than required and almost proved fateful.

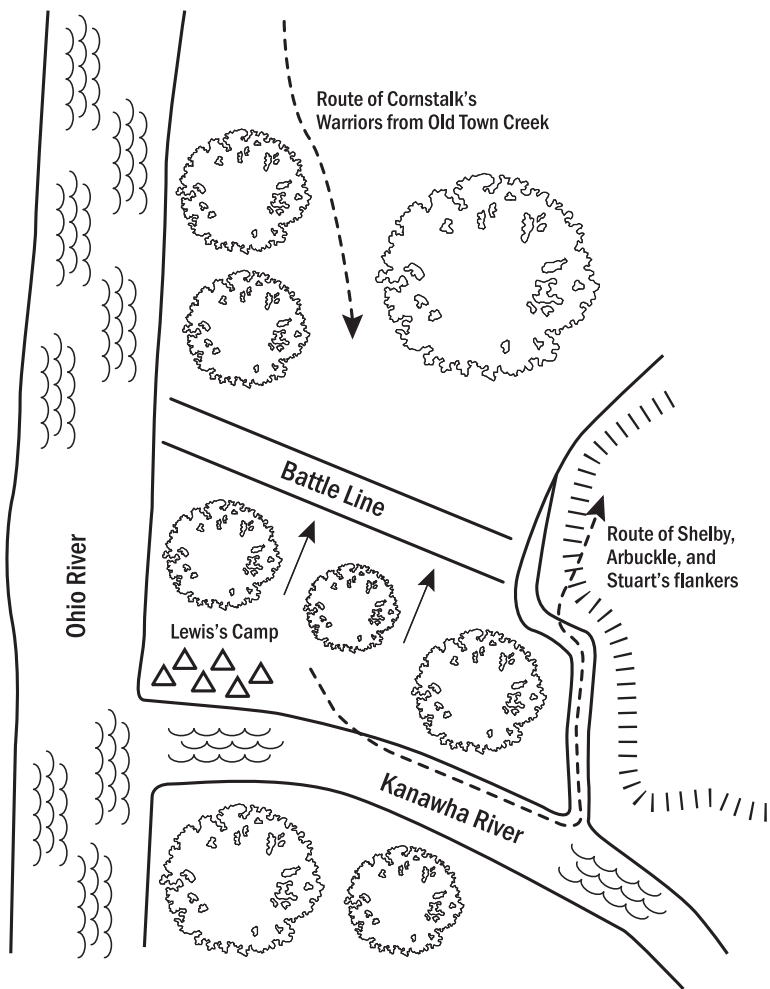
Upon his arrival at Point Pleasant, Lewis ordered William Sharp and William Mason to proceed upriver toward Fort Pitt on October 7, seeking contact with Dunmore. At first light all hands turned to work. Canoes, heavily laden with supplies and ammunition, were unloaded, necessary houses were

constructed for each company, and rude shelters of pine boughs erected. A large log pen was built to contain the cattle at night. On October 9 the Reverend Mr. Terry presented a lengthy, fire-breathing sermon that was attended by all. Resting in the afternoon, the soldiers listened to the tales of traders, who described the savage appearance and extraordinary fighting abilities of the Shawnee. Few seemed concerned, for the enemy was believed to be far away. However, the little army was in for a surprise. A long-remembered mountain ballad describes the morning to come:

Brave Lewis our Colonel, an officer bold,
At the mouth of the Kanawha did the Shawnees behold
On the tenth of October, at the rising sun,
The armies did meet and the battle begun.

During the early-morning hours of October 10, Cornstalk, war chief of the Shawnees, stealthily crossed the Ohio with an allied Indian force of between eight hundred and eleven hundred warriors, grounding their canoes and rafts in Old Town Creek, less than five miles upriver. Camping within two miles of Lewis's force, the hostiles prepared to attack the Point Pleasant camp at dawn. Painted for war, the Indians slipped quietly through the forest toward the glow of campfires, barely seen through an increasing ground fog. Armed with lightweight, smoothbore flintlocks obtained from French traders, the Indian warriors were well prepared for close combat. These inaccurate trade guns became formidable weapons at close range when loaded with between three and ten pieces of buckshot and a musket ball. A quick rush of the sentries, and the warriors could explode from the fog onto the sleeping militiamen.

Andrew Lewis, frustrated at every turn by Dunmore's silence, for once experienced some good fortune. Tired of



Battle of Point Pleasant, October 10, 1774.

stringy beef, two Virginia soldiers had risen early and slipped unobserved out of camp. James Mooney and Joseph Hughey moved furtively up the Ohio, scanning the riverbank for turkey or deer. Emerging from a pocket of dense fog, the duo confronted “five acres of Indians.” Hughey fell under an initial volley, shot down by Tavender Ross, a white renegade, but Mooney was more fortunate, ducking back into the fog and sprinting toward camp screaming a warning. Almost concurrently, two hunters from Shelby’s company, Sergeants James Robertson and Valentine Sevier, also out early, reported the sighting of hostiles. Immediately the militia soldiers rolled out of their blankets, checked their flints, and fell into company formations. Lewis, believing the enemy force to be only a scouting force, sent forward two detachments of 150 men each under Colonel Lewis and Colonel Fleming to confront the advancing hostiles. Fleming’s Botetourt men probed forward along the Ohio River bank while Lewis’s Augusta force advanced parallel and farther inland abreast of the Kanawha. After moving forward almost a half mile, the columns were abruptly checked at sunrise by a hail of enemy gunfire.

Col. Charles Lewis forged to the front, conspicuous in his bright red officer’s waistcoat. Such a target could not long be ignored and he was soon down, a musket ball in the lower abdomen. Reportedly, Lewis exclaimed, “I am wounded but go on and be brave” as he was carried rearward to his tent by Capt. John Murray, his brother-in-law (of no relation to Lord Dunmore), and William Bailey. His detachment wavered and began to fall back slowly. The pressure of the Indian fire then fell primarily upon Fleming’s unit. Within minutes Colonel Fleming, who was attempting to realign his force, received a serious wound in the breast, then was hit

twice in the left arm. Coolly, Fleming walked to the rear. Colonel Field, who bravely rallied forward with two hundred colonial reinforcements, stabilized the wavering colonial line. As the Indian onslaught crested, Field was struck in the head and slain despite sheltering behind a tree. A fellow officer stated, "Field was shot at a great tree by two Indians on his right as he was endeavoring to get a shot at a hostile on his left." Capt. Evan Shelby assumed command of the entire hard-pressed colonial line, gradually configuring a continual line of resistance that stretched from the Ohio on the left flank to the Kanawha on the army's right. Although restrictive to rapid maneuvering, this line was unflankable. Individual soldiers from the encampment, responding to the gunfire, began arriving, filling in the line wherever gaps appeared. Each soldier found cover behind a rock, tree, or stump and fought his individual war. In the heavy fog and thick, hanging gun smoke the Indian warriors pushed in close. Neither party could drive the other nor would either retreat. Rifles and muskets were used as clubs, as were tomahawks, knives, hands, and feet. No quarter was asked and none given.

The voice of Cornstalk, whose real name was Hokolessque, could be heard above the ear-splitting din as he shouted, "Be strong, be strong." Taller than his followers and easily recognizable, Cornstalk's form appeared everywhere, first striking down a colonial then racing to bury his tomahawk in the skull of an Indian shirker. Numerous colonial riflemen snapped rifle shots at the fast-moving Indian leader, but without success. The struggle continued hour after hour with first one side rushing forward then the other. Capt. James Ward, who fell, shot cleanly through the head, was unaware that a son, John, who had been captured by the Shawnee at age three and renamed White Wolf, was firing his rifle with uncommon effect from directly across the battle line.

Warriors shouted, "Why don't you whistle now?" to deride the colonial fifiers who mustered the rifle companies. The Virginians, their backs to the river, were unable to retreat. The anchored line, however, prevented the favored tactic of the Shawnees, turning a flank and gaining an enemy's rear. Surprisingly on this occasion, the Indian warriors came on frontally in brave rushes led by their chiefs, Red Hawk, Blue Jacket, Black Hoof, Chiksikah, Hokolesque, and his son, Elinipsico. Colonel Fleming later wrote, "Never did Indians stick closer to it [European tactics], nor behave bolder."

The bottomland along the river was filled with driftwood from seasonal floods and scattered rock outcroppings and about 1 p.m. a concerted push by the colonials gained a long ridge where abundant logs and rocks offered excellent cover. Slowly the Indians retreated to an opposing ridge that stretched from the Ohio to a swamp on their left, and the firing gradually slackened. As the ground fog lifted, the rifle fire of the colonials increased in effectiveness, for long rifles were decidedly superior to the Indian weapons at that greater range. The fierce hand-to-hand combat that characterized the morning fight could be sustained for only so long, and the afternoon's fighting slowed to intermittent long-range sniping. Still, exposure of one's person could bring rapid death.

Col. Andrew Lewis, who had thus far not meddled with the largely individual fighting, decided in the late afternoon to conduct a maneuver that could turn the battle in his favor. Coolly lighting his pipe, Lewis detailed Captains Evan Shelby, Matthew Arbuckle, George Matthews, and John Stuart to form their companies and find a method to flank the enemy line. The young officers withdrew their men from the colonial line and led them on a circular route up the Kanawha, wading under cover of the riverbank. Turning

up Crooked Creek they emerged from the stream on a slight ridge to the enemy's left rear and suddenly opened a scalding fire that shocked and surprised the Indian warriors. Cornstalk was aware from active scouts that Col. William Christian was moving toward Point Pleasant with the remainder of the Fincastle Regiment. The flanking force was undoubtedly mistaken for the arrival of that column and Cornstalk began to withdraw his forces. He selected the best of his warriors to remain and continue the fight until all the Indian wounded were carried across the Ohio. His sister, Nonhelema, whose great size and strength had earned her the title Grenadier Squaw, conveyed their severely wounded brother, Silverheels, back across the river. Many of the Indian dead were committed to the river and, skillfully, the Indian chief withdrew, his rear guard fading sullenly back into the forest. The engagement had lasted from before sunrise to almost an hour before sunset.

When Christian's regiment arrived about midnight, they found the colonial camp in chaos. The colonial soldiers had begun fortifying their camp by constructing log breastworks, but many were so tired they simply fell asleep. Casualties among the militia troops had been severe. The wounded were suffering horribly, with only minimal medical assistance available. There was little hope of recovery for a large number of them, as many had been shot numerous times. Colonel Fleming, the most noted surgeon, was so badly injured that his very survival was doubtful. Eventually the casualty totals would include seventy-five killed and one hundred forty wounded, almost 20 percent of the force engaged. Col. Charles Lewis and Col. John Field would die of their injuries while Col. William Fleming would be disabled for life. Equally high were losses among the militia captains.

Casualties among the Indians were difficult to ascertain. Thirty-three bodies were recovered, but many of the slain were carried from the field. Colonists felt the enemy loss at least equaled their own, but most sources feel Indian losses of thirty-five to seventy-five are more appropriate. There were no prisoners. The tenor of the colonial survivors can be measured by their bloodthirstiness in erecting a huge pole on the Ohio River bank, which they adorned with eighteen Indian scalps.

Colonel Lewis buried his dead in long rows underneath the trees, where they still lie today. Completion of the fortifications and care of the wounded occupied the army for several days, until on October 17, Lewis crossed the Ohio, leaving a guard to protect the wounded. He advanced toward the Shawnee towns on the Scioto River with each man carrying 1½ pounds of lead and four days' rations, vengeance on the mind of each soldier. A messenger arrived as the force neared the Scioto, informing Lewis that Dunmore was currently drawing up a treaty with the Shawnee and that Lewis should advance no further. Angry and frustrated, Lewis continued to move forward across the Pickaway Plains. He had lost a brother, and his soldiers, many friends and kinsmen.

During the interval following the October 10 clash and Lewis's crossing of the Ohio, Cornstalk's actions were purposeful and decisive. First he attempted to rally his followers to continue their resistance. At council in Yellow Hawk's town on the Scioto he stated, "We must fight no matter how many may fall or we are undone." But when he received no affirmation from his allies, Cornstalk realized that the Shawnee could not fight alone. Burying his tomahawk in the ground, he angrily shouted, "Since you will not fight I go and make peace." Wisely, the Indian chief

opened negotiations with Dunmore at Camp Charlotte. So smoothly did he present his case that Dunmore intercepted Lewis and ordered his lieutenant to countermarch. Cornstalk promised to surrender all white prisoners held by the assorted tribes and vowed that the Indians would cease hunting south of the Ohio and discontinue harassing boats on the river. Dunmore followed with a promise that no more whites would enter Kentucky and that no settler should ever set foot north of the Ohio River.

At a formal little ceremony, Dunmore met Lewis's officers, and shaking hands, complimented them profusely on their victory. But Lewis posted guards around the governor's marquee, for the mood of his soldiers was abusive toward Dunmore, several frontiersmen having made direct threats. Reluctantly Lewis began to march back toward Point Pleasant, arriving there on October 28. Dunmore's extravagant claims of saving the frontier allocated little credit to Andrew Lewis and his men, but Lewis knew well how close the contest had actually been. He was aware that if the scales of victory had tipped to the enemy, then he and each of his men would lie dead on the battlefield or be bound over as captives to grace the fires of the very villages he was forbidden to destroy.

Leaving Captain Arbuckle and fifty volunteers to garrison newly erected Fort Blair at Point Pleasant, Lewis dismissed his army by companies to return to Camp Union. Officially, his entire command was disbanded on November 4, 1774. Lord Dunmore's little war was over.

The governor received an extravagantly complimentary resolution from the Virginia House of Burgesses for his rapid redress of the Indian threat, but the controversy of his leadership and suspicion of his purposes was only beginning. Many Virginia families suffered grievously as a

result of the brief campaign. Samuel Crawley of Pittsylvania County enlisted in the Botetourt Regiment and marched off, never to return. His widow, Elizabeth, and her many children consequently were reduced to a life of absolute poverty, unaided by pension or state compensation. Col. Charles Lewis's wife, Rachael, grieved so long and hard for her slain husband that many grew to believe her demented. Numbers of other Virginia frontiersmen, wounded seriously, would evermore exist on the care of their families. John McKenney, who had two bullet holes and a tomahawk blow to his back, would remain an invalid for life. So too would Col. William Fleming remain physically handicapped, although his active mind would gain political employment.

As details emerged and the ideological conflict with Great Britain grew imminent, Dunmore's status among the populace diminished rapidly amid extreme bias. The royal governor's actions in the Indian war were critiqued and questioned, even to the point that some claimed he had contrived to bring on the war for personal reasons. Many Virginians openly accused Lord Dunmore of duplicity in his dealings with the enemy. Col. John Stuart, who marched with the force, stated, "Dunmore acted as a party to British politicians who wished to incite an Indian War which might prevent or distract the Virginia colony from the growing grievances with England." While the serious nature of that charge is evident, some went even further, avowing that Dunmore had actually connived with or attempted to manipulate the Indians into annihilating Lewis and his army. This action, which Andrew Lewis personally came to believe, could have benefited Great Britain in the approaching conflict by stripping the Virginia frontier of defenders. But such a broad-based

charge of contrived plotting seems to endow Lord Dunmore with skills of prognostication even beyond the scope of a royal governor.

A more likely accusation lodged by historian Archibald Henderson places Dunmore as party to a conspiracy with the nefarious Dr. John Connolly. The two reportedly initiated a complicated scheme to secure vast tracts of land from the Indians and found an expansive colony in the area between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. This scheme resembled and rivaled Lord Dartmouth's 1769 project of founding Vandalia in the American forests with a capital at the mouth of the Great Kanawha, a plan that may have been more con than reality. While Dunmore surely coveted western acreage, so did George Washington, Patrick Henry, and even Andrew Lewis. Possession of cheap western land was the surest route to power and prestige in America. Dunmore was surely willing to use the patronage appointments attached to his office for that purpose. While he attempted to extend Virginia lands over the mountains and into the Ohio Valley, as evidenced by his efforts to acquire Fort Pitt and its environs from Pennsylvania, could he and his associates not enjoy some personal advantage?

A realistic appraisal of Lord Dunmore's talents perhaps can be ascertained by comparing his military and political exertions with the individual with whom he competed and consistently underestimated, Cornstalk. This handsome, charismatic war chief maintained a diplomatic presence several strides in advance of his colonial adversary. Through an excellent cadre of scouts, Cornstalk shadowed each movement of both advancing colonial columns. He opened long-distance negotiations with Dunmore as the governor's force moved downriver, while the crafty

Shawnee leader concurrently planned the isolation and destruction of Lewis's column at the rendezvous point. It can be postulated that Cornstalk's messages to Dunmore were merely premeditated ruses to delay, stall, and pacify the governor with promises of peace while he destroyed Lewis. If Lewis and his men were removed from the military chessboard, Cornstalk could then possibly bluff, intimidate, or defeat the inexperienced Dunmore.

Fearless in combat, Cornstalk almost achieved the military victory, for in truth, his advancing forces were discovered by accident. When Lewis's army narrowly survived, and Cornstalk's allies deserted, the war chief quickly journeyed to Dunmore's camp and reopened his overtures, settling for a favorable peace before Lewis's vengeful column could unite with the governor. Dunmore only caught a single glimpse of Cornstalk's range of character, intellect, and ability, though as he later discussed the agreement of Camp Charlotte, Dunmore conceded, "I have heard the first orators of Virginia . . . but never heard one whose powers of delivery surpassed those of Cornstalk on that occasion."

The brief little war that history would label "Lord Dunmore's War" was but another chapter in the violent struggle to control the Ohio. From the close of the French and Indian War in 1763 until Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794 the cruel, violent clash of cultures persisted. The last bastion of defense for the eastern Indian tribes was the Ohio River Valley. Both whites and Indians believed their cause was right and as warfare persisted they both came to believe that continued existence of the other party threatened their future. The colonists' obsession with land, to be held and passed on in perpetuity, gave them the individual freedom and self-determination that they so avidly desired. But this fundamental

concept could never be understood, save as avarice by an Indian culture to which land, streams, and rivers were a communal possession. War, disease, and settlement—the three horsemen of the Indian apocalypse—gradually pushed the Indian population into extinction.

Dunmore's War quieted the ongoing conflict, at least for several years. It was 1777, three years later, before Indian tribes began to ally themselves with the British who replaced the French in the forts along the Great Lakes. This interlude freed the experienced frontiersmen of Virginia to provide needed leadership and spirit to the American Revolutionary army. The victory of Lewis's small army was the first purely American military effort, undertaken and executed totally by frontier militia, a valuable prognosticator for military organization in the Colonies.

Turning Against the British

Within twenty-four hours of her husband's triumphant return to the Williamsburg governor's mansion, Lady Dunmore gave birth to a daughter whom the rejoicing couple named Virginia. Honored by the edicts of both the House of Burgesses and the College of William and Mary, John Murray's status in the colony seemed unassailable as winter approached. But the progression of events about Boston and the congressional discussions in Philadelphia strained the governor's relationships with the Burgesses and the populace. Dunmore sternly condemned all colonial protestors and identified most as traitors, leaving little opportunity for mediation with his Virginia subjects. John Murray was never a commanding presence in the New World; however, he was at best a competent administrator in the British tradition. When revolution erupted, Dunmore's zeal in seeking to

retain the colony within his majesty's realm of influence earned the earl the burning hatred of his former subjects.

In April 1775 he dispatched sailors from the HMS *Magdalen* on a midnight raid to remove more than fifteen barrels of powder from the octagonal brick powder magazine in the capital. Mob protests developed with conditions so tense that Dunmore sent his wife and children aboard the HMS *Fowey*, anchored near Yorktown. While a settlement of payment was negotiated with Patrick Henry concerning the powder, Dunmore's position deteriorated as he alternately offered conciliatory terms then issued threats of a slave insurrection. Finally on June 5, 1775, Dunmore joined his family aboard the *Fowey*. Sailing down the York River into the Chesapeake Bay, Dunmore's small flotilla anchored in the Elizabeth River near Norfolk, and he attempted to rule the colony from his floating town.

Immediately his Lordship began efforts to assemble a military force sufficient to coerce the Virginia colony's continued loyalty to George III. In February, the HMS *Roebuck*, a ship of forty-four guns commanded by Capt. Andrew Hammond, arrived in the Chesapeake, augmenting Dunmore's military power markedly, despite the fact that Captain Hammond and Lord Dunmore were continually at contrasting purposes. Dunmore next landed troops and entrenched on Tucker's Mill Point, a peninsula in the Elizabeth River from which he could obtain water and livestock by raiding nearby plantations. By March his flotilla, now grown to almost eighty vessels, was forced to evacuate Tucker's by several well-sited rebel artillery batteries emplaced by American general Charles Lee.

Sailing up the bay to the mouth of the Piankatank, Dunmore began unloading his forces at Gwynn's Island, a secure site that he considered unassailable. Fortifications

were begun, including two stockades, several batteries, and an entrenchment encircling the tented camp. Here his former reluctant ally, Andrew Lewis, now an American brigadier general, would challenge Dunmore.

As Lewis prepared to attack the royal governor, his well-placed scouts reported scurvy and bilious fever raging amid the British with scores of burials conducted daily on Gwynn's Island. A company of the Seventh Virginia led by Thomas Posey crept to the water's edge and observed as additional soldiers landed off the island in a pelting rain-storm. On July 8, Lewis arrived with two additional regiments and an artillery train to find Posey's frontiersmen employed in digging trenches into the riverbank that opened on to the waterfront, whereupon a battery of two 18-pounders was emplaced in concealment. Also masked was a second battery of 6- and 9-pounders.

On July 9 at 10 A.M., only five days after the Declaration of Independence was ratified by the Continental Congress, the batteries opened on Dunmore's unsuspecting and carelessly anchored ships with significant effect. The first shot, touched off by Lewis, holed the *Dunmore*, creating panic. Soon the *Otter*, *William*, and *Fowey* were struck by American balls. John Buchanan, a valley soldier, remarked, "We could hear our 18 pound balls hit the sides of the ships as if one was throwing stones against a tobacco barn." As Dunmore's ships fled, Lewis's gunners directed their fire on the British camp and fortifications. Soon the scene was one of disjointed and frightened British troops attempting to board the remaining ships of the fleet.

Lewis had collected rowboats and skiffs preparatory to a proposed dawn attack by Capt. Robert McClanahan's unit of selected frontiersmen. However, when Posey's company, which led the sea-born assault via these small craft, landed

on Gwynn's Island no fighting ensued. Only the dead and dying remained. Unburied bodies were scattered among the breastworks interspaced with others crying for assistance. Almost five hundred casualties were discovered, including a majority of Dunmore's ill-fated Royal Ethiopian Regiment, a black unit led by white officers, abandoned by the governor. Vulnerable to disease, the ex-slaves had been decimated by smallpox, their bodies burned beyond recognition in an attempt to minimize contagion. Only one American casualty was recorded; a Captain Arundel of the artillery was slain by the premature explosion of his own hand-constructed wooden mortar.

A final refuge on St. George's Island in the bay permitted Dunmore to prepare his vessels for an Atlantic crossing and on August 6, 1776, he cleared the Virginia Capes for England. Doubtless, Andrew Lewis enjoyed driving Dunmore from Virginia, despite the absence of a real military confrontation. But the skirmish at Gwynn's Island would prove the final military effort of the old soldier. His health declined and he suffered a stroke at a friend's house near Montvale, Virginia, dying at age sixty-one, mere weeks prior to the American victory at Yorktown.

The third individual so conspicuous in the Point Pleasant fight was Cornstalk, the Shawnee chief who suffered an even more ignominious fate. An expert at the cut, slash, and burn raids that characterized Indian warfare, Cornstalk deployed and fought his warriors on the Kanawha banks in the style of the long knives. He was surely the most famous and feared Indian leader of the border wars preceding the revolution. His very name evoked terror and fear among the frontier settlers.

By the spring of 1777 the Camp Charlotte agreement, never formally adopted, was in a state of dissolution. At last

Cornstalk concluded that the “treaty was no longer” and he set out for Fort Randolph at Point Pleasant to nullify his personal oath. When he explained his inability to honor his former promise to Commander Arbuckle, the militia captain placed him in confinement while awaiting higher orders. His companions, including Red Hawk and the chief’s own son, Elinipsico, were also retained. On November 9, gunfire erupted across the Kanawha. Two young hunters, Hamilton and Gilmore, had crossed the stream in search of deer. Indian warriors concealed on the riverbank fired on the duo, killing and scalping Gilmore. When a rescue party returned with Gilmore’s body, a cry was raised to kill the Shawnee imprisoned at the fort. Soon a mob of twenty-five men charged the gates, brushing aside Arbuckle’s objections.

The wife of an interpreter ran to warn Cornstalk, advising him to flee, but he turned to his son and companion stating, “The Great Spirit had determined we shall die together! Let us submit.” Stepping into the doorway, Cornstalk received a rifle volley and fell dead on the threshold. His son and companion were also slain. A sudden exodus of the perpetrators followed the violent massacre. Although a Rockbridge court made inquiries, inspired by the anger of Patrick Henry, a formal trial was never convened. No justice ensued for the death of even so famous a Shawnee. The only vengeance for the act was that exacted by the Shawnee in the war to follow—and no man ever bragged of his part in the dishonorable affair.

At Tu-Endie-Wei Park (Shawnee for “mingling of the waters”) near the bridge to Gallipolis, Ohio, lie the dead of Point Pleasant. For nearly seventy years they lay in silence and neglect, despite their valor and sacrifice. They rest now in long rows beneath a bronze tablet recording their names. A statue of a Virginia frontier rifleman guards their

final bivouac. Close by in a simple grave rests the remains of the Indian warrior and statesman Cornstalk. Near these gravesites rises an eighty-four-foot granite shaft, the tallest battle monument west of the Alleghenies, honoring a battle stoutly contested and long forgotten. The revolutionary conflict, with its wide-reaching implications, swallowed the survivors of Point Pleasant, and the scope and ferocity of open warfare overshadowed the sacrifice of the men who fought and died there.

The campaign that culminated at Point Pleasant has often been styled “the first battle of the American Revolution.” This is, of course, an exaggeration of facts, but the campaign did serve as an important training ground for Continental soldiers and officers. There were no British regulars involved; the operation and initiative were entirely colonial, and in fact, British home authorities expressed their disapproval of Dunmore’s martial enterprise. The logistics, transportation, and tactics of the campaign were militia based, all areas that had previously—in other campaigns—been led by redcoat professionals. The training and experience obtained proved of great value in the organization of Continental forces in the southern provinces. The men in the columns of both Dunmore and Lewis participated in the revolution in large numbers, many becoming Continental officers of merit.

This first purely American victory additionally provided a window of opportunity whereby Virginia Continental regiments for a time could be recruited uninhibited by Indian raids. The exposed flank of the Virginia colony was temporarily protected and by the influx of settlers into Kentucky and the Ohio Valley, the Indian warfare that sputtered all during the revolution did not warrant state participation.