FROM
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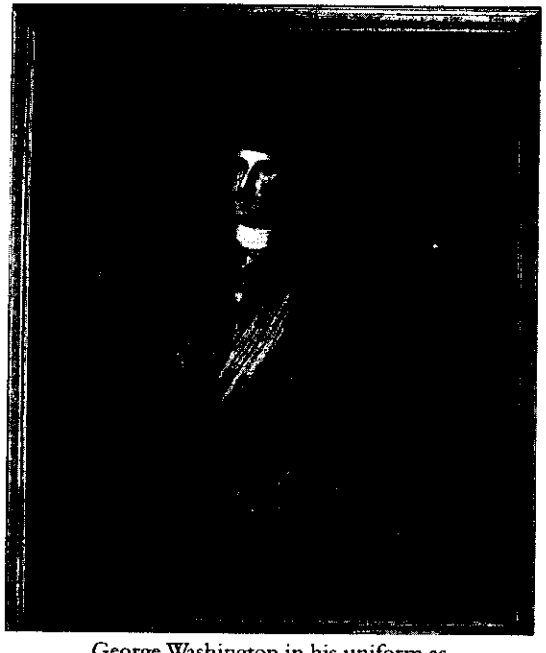
CHAPTER THREE

Washington's Apprenticeship: Imperial Victory and Collapse

John Adams—brilliant, stout, prickly, fretful, and short—was perhaps the hardest-working delegate at the Second Continental Congress, a man so busy that it took him more than two weeks after the assembly convened on May 10, 1775, to write to his beloved wife, Abigail, back in Massachusetts. His first letter home was brief and general. "Our Business is more extensive . . . and hazardous" than at the First Congress, he reported, but "our Unanimity will not be less."[1] Only his second letter, written on the twenty-ninth, carried the personal and political news that Abigail craved. "The military Spirit that runs through the Continent," he wrote, "is truly amazing." Two thousand volunteer troops turned out daily in Philadelphia for training; their officers included three of the Pennsylvania delegates. Yet it was the martial character of a delegate from Virginia that most impressed Adams: "Col[one]l Washington appears at Congress in his Uniform and, by his great Experience and Abilities in military Matters, is of much service to Us."[2]

It seemed clear to many of the delegates that George Washington, a man of few words, had put on the blue-and-buff uniform of the Fairfax Independent Company in order to make a public statement.[3] Adams, who saw the necessity of bringing the southern colonies into the struggle, believed that Washington was announcing his willingness to lead the colonies' military forces (currently made up entirely of New Englanders) against the British army that occupied Boston. Seizing on that assumption, he worked tirelessly to see that Congress offered Washington the command of the Continental Army on June 15. Washington's perseverance in that position throughout the Revolutionary War has led historians to infer that by wearing the uniform Washington was actively campaigning for the appointment.[4] It would be easy enough to take the next step and conclude that in seeking the generalship he had already embraced the cause of independence, and was prepared to risk his life and fortune to achieve it. But was that in fact what he was trying to communicate?



George Washington in his uniform as colonel of the First Virginia Regiment, 1772. A portrait by Charles Willson Peale.

We cannot know, for Washington—characteristically—never explained his motives. A hint of what the act of donning a uniform meant to him, however, can be found in the only previous occasion on which we know he wore one after his resignation as colonel of the First Virginia Regiment in 1758. In May 1772, when the Philadelphia artist Charles Willson Peale came to Mount Vernon to paint Washington's portrait, he dressed in his old colonel's regimentals as a means of commemorating his service in the Seven Years' War. Peale gave the picture a wooded background to suggest the western Pennsylvania landscape through which Washington had marched as a division commander on General John Forbes's expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1758. So that there could be no mistake about the setting, Peale painted a folded sheet of paper bearing the words "Order of March" in Washington's

waistcoat pocket. Moreover, in addition to the gorget at his throat, the sword at his side, and the officer's fusee at his back, Washington chose to include a fourth military accouterment in the picture: a faded red sash. Such sashes were panels of heavy silk mesh, ten to twelve feet long and perhaps three feet wide, that officers wore into battle. They did not do so merely to look dashing: should the wearer be wounded, his men could unfurl the silk into a litter and use it to carry him from the field. The sash that Washington wore in the painting had belonged to General Edward Braddock, who gave it to him as a memento after suffering a mortal wound at the Battle of the Monongahela in 1755. Unless Washington pointed them out, Peale would not have known that the sash bore the stains of Braddock's blood.[5]

Washington had never before sat for a portrait, and for all he knew would never do so again.[6] Thus it seems fair to conclude that the uniform and other elements recalling his service in the Seven Years' War were important enough to him that he wished to make them part of what might be the only permanent record of his appearance. In 1772 Washington chose to be portrayed as a soldier of the crown, a veteran of the imperial war that had broken French power in North America and transferred sovereignty over the eastern half of the continent to Great Britain. In 1775 he wore the newer uniform of a volunteer company whose members had pledged themselves "to defend to the utmost of our Power, the legal prerogatives of our Sovereign King George the third, and the just Rights & Privileges of our Country, our Posterity & ourselves upon the Principles of the British Constitution."[7] Washington was no more prepared than his fellow delegates in the Continental Congress to abjure allegiance to King George III. It took more than a year of bloodshed and violence to convince a majority in Congress that all hope of reconciliation was dead and that they had no alternative but to declare Independence.

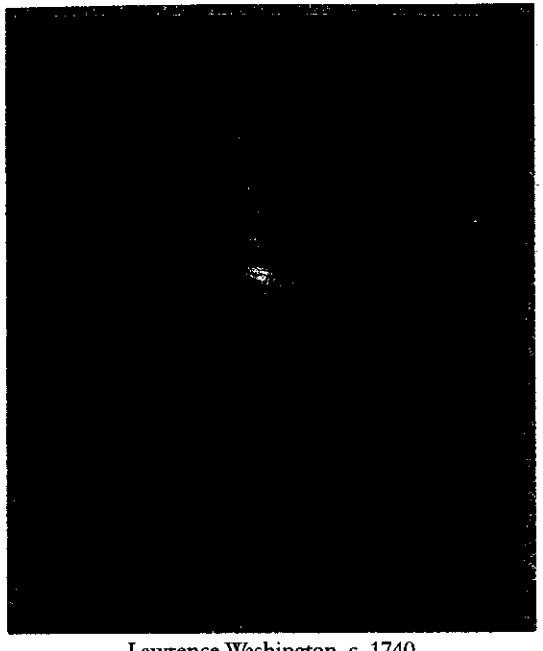
Because most modern Americans are accustomed to thinking about the beginnings of the Revolutionary War in terms of the Independence that followed rather than the war for empire that had preceded it, they find the ambivalence and confusion of 1775 hard to imagine. Yet for Washington and other colonials of his generation, the Seven Years' War—what they called "the late French War" or "the French and Indian War"—had been a world-shaping event. Since 1763 they had been trying to cope with the unforeseen consequences of decisive victory over France, trying to define a set of political relationships within the empire in which all Britons, whether born in the United Kingdom or America, were partners. They did not yet understand that the Seven Years' War had marked the beginning of a epochal divide in North American history, the onset of what we have called the Age of Empires and Revolutions. In late May of 1775 they certainly did not know that the fighting begun in Massachusetts the previous month would develop into a truly revolutionary war and continue the vast transformation that the Seven Years' War had begun.

George Washington, a loyal subject of the crown when he put his uniform to attend the sessions of the Continental Congress, was at the center of all these astonishing developments. An advocate of empire long before he became a the hero of a revolution, his youthful enthusiasms and blunders had been central to the origins of the Seven Years' War. His revolutionary transformation paralleled that of a republic not yet born: the American nation that eventually claimed him as its Father.

Surveyor, Speculator, Soldier, Spy: The Rise of George Washington

The greatest influence that Washington's own father, Augustine (Gus), had on his son was to die in 1743, when George was eleven years of age. Gus, not quite fifty at his passing, had been a younger son and the third in a line of successful planters, all of whom had met their Maker at roughly the same age. Early death was commonplace in the Chesapeake, but its repetition over three generations kept the ambitious Washingtons from rising higher than the second rank of the provincial gentry.[8] Most of Gus's property went to his oldest son, Lawrence, who was twenty-five when his father died, fourteen years older than his half-brother George. George's far smaller portion—Ferry Farm on the Rappahannock, with 260 acres of indifferent soil and ten slaves plus half interest in Deep Run, an undeveloped tract of 4,360 acres—promised a station far below his father's. Until he was twenty-one, moreover, his property remained under the control of his formidable mother, Mary Ball Washington.[9]

Gus died before he could do much to shape his son's character. The authoritarian and possessive Mary did more—much more, it seems, than George wished. By the age of fourteen he was trying to escape, begging to go to sea as a midshipman in the Royal Navy. She forbade it in terms that implied her determination to keep him under her thumb as long as she possessed a thumb, and that suggested no force on earth would ever budge her from Ferry Farm. Not long after, George developed an interest in surveying that took him increasingly away from his mother, to Mount Vernon, the Potomac plantation where Lawrence lived.[10]



Lawrence Washington, c. 1740.
This portrait, by an anonymous artist, shows him as he appeared at the time of his appointment as captain in the American Regiment, before the siege of Cartagena.

Lawrence took a paternal interest in the lad, who reciprocated by making a hero of his brother. The older Washington was everything that the shy, gawky, haphazardly educated boy longed to be. An English public-school education had given him the easy, polished manner of a gentleman. Lawrence had lately built on the foundation inherited from his father by marrying into the powerful Fairfax clan, whose great house, Belvoir, lay just upriver from Mount Vernon.[11] Lawrence encouraged George to become a surveyor and made it clear why—apart from the excuse to absent himself from Ferry Farm—it made sense for him to study the art of laying out plats with a circumferentor and a two-pole chain.[12] Although no training could have been a more symbolically apt prelude to a life dedicated to defining and defending territorial, political, and cultural boundaries, Washington's early pursuit of surveying was simply a pragmatic and prudent response to the circumstances of his life and his region.

The prosperity, indeed the rule, of Virginia's gentry depended on speculating in land. A provincial economy based on slavery and tobacco, a crop

that impoverished the soil, made territorial expansion imperative for Virginia's elite. Because plantable ground was an inelastic resource whereas the supply of slaves was as elastic as the ability to reproduce, the great planters could all too easily foresee the day when their descendants, seated on worn land, might be bankrupted by feeding and housing their all-too-fertile, underemployed slaves. Virginia had to grow or die.

Flexible inheritance strategies could solve part of the problem. As Gus Washington's case implies, planters often wrote wills that stipulated that their estates *not* go (as a strict application of the principle of primogeniture required) exclusively to the eldest son. Planters who harbored dynastic ambitions did indeed take care to pass along the lion's share of their lands to their eldest sons, for social and economic status correlated directly to the number of cultivated acres one owned. But it was equally important to the long-run welfare of family lines that younger sons be given surplus slaves and undeveloped land—such as George's ten slaves and his half of the Deep Run tract—on which to found their own plantations.

Planters seeking properties for younger sons created a steady demand for "unimproved"—that is, forested—land. That demand, growing along with Virginia's population, motivated the province's wealthiest gentlemen to secure vastly larger, more remote tracts. As crown lands, Virginia's unallocated territories to the south and west of the Rappahannock could be sold or granted only by authority of the governor and Council.[13] Gentlemen with money and political connections could pick up forty or fifty or even a hundred thousand acres of forest for pennies per acre, provided that they agreed to "seat" families on those tracts within a reasonable period of time. They could then resell land at a tidy profit merely by waiting for expanding population to drive up demand. Even greater advantages could be achieved with a modest additional investment—the building of a small house, the loan of tools and seed—that allowed properties to be rented out to backwoods farmers in return for a share of the crops they grew. As the tenants felled trees and planted new fields, they "improved" the land and increased its value. Tenants might eventually buy the farms in which they had invested so much labor; if they did not, their leases could be terminated and the land sold off at premium prices.

This system conferred advantages that went beyond profit. Great planters who owned speculative holdings were able to seat their younger sons, sons-in-law, and other kinsmen on the best of those lands, designating them as agents for the sale or rental of the remainder. The wealthiest local residents therefore controlled access to land, virtually insuring the deference

of smaller planters. When new county governments were created, the governor and Council allocated the key positions—justice of the peace, militia commander, sheriff, county surveyor—to the sons and other agents of the big speculators, confirming their social status and cementing their institutional power to rule. The election of prominent local landholders to the House of Burgesses followed as naturally as night followed day. Land speculation thus freed Virginia's aristocrats from complete dependence on tobacco for their income even as it enabled them to replicate the social and political hierarchies of the Tidewater on the frontier. However unrefined and even democratic they may have appeared to those who passed along their rutted roads, Virginia's backcountry counties were never outside the control of gentry figures.[14]

Surveyors sustained this system, both as land scouts working for the great speculators and as public officials entrusted with establishing the legal boundaries of all purchases and grants. Because no title could be registered without an official survey, they formed the third leg of the tripod—speculator, agent, and surveyor—on which the land system of Virginia rested. Even more significant for the surveyors themselves was the lucrative official schedule of fees for their services. Surveyors seldom failed to collect what their clients owed: official plats and descriptions alone could make land titles legal, so would-be owners had every reason to pay surveyors promptly. Such reliable access to cash gave the men with the circumferentors capital to purchase tracts for themselves. In this way surveyors frequently acquired speculative holdings of ten or even twenty thousand acres: tracts that while far smaller than those of the grandees were sizable enough to make a successful surveyor a man of consequence.[15]

Lawrence Washington wanted his brother to learn surveying because of opportunities close to home. His wife's second cousin, Lord Thomas Fairfax, sixth Baron Cameron, was sole proprietor of the Northern Neck, the peninsula between the Rappahannock and the Potomac rivers.[16] By the time Lord Fairfax came to control the proprietorship, the lower reaches of the Northern Neck had long since been divided into the tobacco plantations that provided livelihoods for prosperous gentry, such as the Washingtons. Because the quitrents to which he was entitled were not only modest but notoriously hard to collect, Fairfax's only hope of realizing a truly lordly income from the grant required the sale of new lands, and that in turn depended on having the Privy Council recognize the bounds of his grant as extending well inland. Fortunately for his lordship, the Privy Council obliged in 1745, issuing a decision that construed the original grant, made in

1649, as including all the lands that lay between the Rappahannock and the Potomac from their mouths to their headwaters. That ruling assigned Lord Fairfax a domain of more than 5 million acres, an area as big as Wales. He in turn entrusted the surveying and sale of tracts to his cousin and agent, Colonel William Fairfax, the master of Belvoir, and the father-in-law of Lawrence Washington.[17]

Lawrence thus saw surveying as a respectable, socially useful occupation that had every prospect of opening the door to far greater wealth than George's modest inheritance provided. Lawrence also knew that no matter how able George might prove in setting metes and bounds, his ultimate success depended on developing a close personal connection with the Fairfax family. Lawrence accordingly introduced George to his father-in-law and eventually to the eccentric bachelor baron himself, the only British nobleman to make his home in the North American colonies. Both Fairfaxes saw in the boy something they liked.

In March 1748 Colonel William Fairfax invited the sixteen-year-old George to accompany his own twenty-four-year-old son (and assistant agent) George William on a springtime expedition to survey tracts in the northern Shenandoah Valley. This journey, on which Washington assisted a more experienced surveyor, afforded him two important opportunities. The first and most immediately important was the chance to prove himself trustworthy and competent within sight of a patron whose support he would need if he were to rise in the world. Second, his month-long trip beyond the Blue Ridge allowed him to glimpse a western world that fired his imagination and that soon became the focus of his dreams.

George sufficiently demonstrated his skills as a surveyor that George William Fairfax commended him to his father, who in turn began to use young Washington's services extensively. In 1749 Lord Fairfax himself saw to it that Washington was appointed as county surveyor in the new county of Culpeper at the foot of the Blue Ridge, even though he was only seventeen. It was George's first public office and the first step on his long, determined climb to the top of the Virginia elite. He worked hard for his patrons: by the spring of 1751 he had run nearly 200 surveys on proprietary lands west of the Blue Ridge.[18]

The ties that Washington cultivated with the Fairfax family gave him the contacts he needed to advance in a social system structured by patronage. A young man's intelligence and ambition mattered little if he had no patron to vouchsafe his qualities within the small circle of men who controlled access to public offices and significant economic opportunities. Thanks to the

Fairfax connection, while still in his teens Washington forged ties with eminent planters—Richard Corbin, Virginia's receiver general; John Robinson, its treasurer; Landon Carter, a rising power in the House of Burgesses; and others—who sponsored his ascent.[19]

Washington absorbed the attitudes of the class to which he aspired without criticism if not without anxiety. He keenly felt his lack of formal education and strove all the harder to make up for it by copying out lists of aphorisms on polite behavior (an activity by which he intended to polish both manners and penmanship), by reading popular works of literature for clues to the mysterious codes of genteel conversation, by interrogating Lawrence and his other older half-brother, Augustine, and by carefully observing the manners and behavior of the Fairfaxes and other provincial aristocrats. Instinctively understanding that speech is merely the small change of silence, he began to cultivate the reserved, formal manner that later observers cited as evidence of his dignity and imperturbable self-assurance.[20]

Yet Washington also knew that a refined, reserved personal style was not enough to win him respect and power. His tenuous and dependent position made the need to prove himself worthy all the more urgent. That meant finding a way to serve the public interest with the steadfast selflessness that his contemporaries called "virtue" and understood, above all, as the quality that defined a gentleman.[21] Lawrence, as always, offered the model: he had served as a captain in the regiment that Virginia sent to take part in the siege of Cartagena in 1740. The siege was a fiasco, with a mortality rate that exceeded 80 percent, but by his faithful service and survival Lawrence had shown himself worthy of the public trust. Soon after his return he was elected as a member of the House of Burgesses and appointed adjutant general of the provincial militia.

Exalted notions of a gentleman's attributes, then, influenced Washington's efforts to build his own character as strongly as the desire for wealth and lands shaped his economic activities. Those ambitions, compounded by the anxieties he felt about his own less-than-secure claim to gentility, increased his readiness to look down on the manifestly ungenteel people he encountered while surveying. Thus on his first trip west, Washington showed little interest in a group of Indian warriors he met "coming from War with only one Scalp," describing them only in terms of their drinking and "comicle" dancing.[22] He had no more understanding for a party of German backwoods settlers who seemed "to be as Ignorant a Set of People as the Indians."[23] On another surveying expedition, he described a family in whose cabin he had taken shelter as something less even than savages. They slept together, he wrote, "before the fire upon a Little Hay Straw Fodder or bairskin . . . Man Wife and Children like a Parcel of Dogs or Catts." "Nothing," he wrote, "would make it [such rude company] pass of[f] tolerably but a good Reward[.]"[24]

Washington's scorn for Indians and frontier folk was hardly unusual in eighteenth-century British America, where the most unfavorable depictions of backcountry life invariably came from those with the most elevated notions of their own gentility.[25] Indeed, Washington's adolescent disdain for Indians and backwoodsmen demonstrated the degree to which he had internalized the values of the Fairfaxes and their class. He was never drawn to the country beyond the Blue Ridge by some romantic desire to gaze on unexplored vistas. Although he was certainly capable of admiring nature—as, for example, the "beautiful groves of Sugar [maple] Trees" he saw on the Shenandoah in March 1748, when he "spent the best part of the Day in admiring the Trees & richness of the Land"—what he most appreciated was how nature might be put to use.[26] The "richness of the Land" impressed the novice surveyor and gentleman because he was learning how it could be transformed into riches of a more tangible sort.

By the time Washington began his career as a land speculator in late 1750 by purchasing a thousand acres he had surveyed along a Shenandoah tributary called Bullskin Run, he had fully embraced the expansionist values, attitudes, and behaviors of the Virginia gentry.[27] No less than Lawrence or Colonel William Fairfax, Washington understood the imperial enterprise as a civilizing mission. Though speculators, agents, and surveyors worked togther to create profit for themselves, they also believed that they were investing energy and undertaking financial risks to bring order, law, and security to a chaotic zone whose inhabitants—barbarians, or nearly so—desperately needed the good government that the gentry alone could provide. Gentry expansionism was in that sense an explicitly future-oriented enterprise and not only because distant lands purchased for a pittance gained value when populations grew and the demand for farms increased. It also looked ahead to the continuing replication of Virginia's social order and thus the extension of English law, institutions, and civilization—and all the blessings (including slavery) that accompanied them.

Washington and his mentors claimed no manifest destiny to establish English dominion over the continent of North America. Yet they also acknowledged neither a legal nor a practical westward limit to their colony's expansion. The charter of Virginia, issued in 1609 before anyone in England had a notion of North America's true size, stipulated no western boundary

but the Pacific Ocean and sketched a northern border that angled off on a northwesterly axis vaguely parallel to the Potomac until it struck the Great Lakes—or, arguably, the Bering Strait. Even with the Northern Neck proprietorship, where a clear western limit did exist, Virginians looked beyond, planning future acquisitions even further west, notwithstanding the enormous amounts of land nearer home that remained to be surveyed and settled.

The reflexive quality of gentry expansionism explains why in 1744 Virginia's delegates had eagerly gone to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to negotiate a treaty with representatives of the Iroquois League: they hoped to acquire lands for settlement beyond the western boundary of the Fairfax proprietary lands and indeed beyond the Alleghenies, in the Ohio River Valley. At this point the leaders of the Six Nations had been working hand in glove with Thomas Penn and James Logan for eight years and fully appreciated the benefits they enjoyed as a result of the English authorities' willingness to recognize them as spokesmen for the Delawares, Shawnees, and other peoples they claimed as clients. Canasatego and the other League chiefs came to Lancaster as confident negotiators, ready to assert sovereignty over several southern Indian peoples, to secure Virginia's recognition of their warriors' right to pass freely through the province to raid the Cherokees and Catawbas of South Carolina, and (not coincidentally) to collect a substantial diplomatic gift. In return, the Iroquois spokesmen were prepared to cede all of the League's remaining claims within the limits of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia.[28]

It is clear in retrospect that the Six Nations' diplomats at Lancaster believed that Virginia's bounds extended no further west than the Shenandoah Valley and that they had no intention of surrendering any of the League's claims beyond the Alleghenies. But the Virginia delegates, for obvious reasons, chose to interpret the Iroquois cession as encompassing all the trans-Allegheny lands that fell within the vast zone defined by the 1609 charter. The following year, the House of Burgesses bestowed 300 square miles of territory at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers on a syndicate of Northern Neck gentlemen, including Lawrence Washington, who had formed the Ohio Company. If they fulfilled their obligations to seat settlers on the land, another grant of nearly 500 square miles was to be added; more and larger grants would inevitably follow. Confident of Virginia's expansion into the Ohio Valley, they were positioning themselves to dominate a realm that might one day dwarf even that of Lord Thomas Fairfax.[29]

George Washington was only thirteen when the Ohio Company was

formed and therefore not a stockholder; but because Lawrence was a founding member, George's anticipated career as a surveyor made him fit into the Ohio scheme like a cog into a gearwheel. (Indeed, in 1749 or 1750, when he set himself up as an independent surveyor, George volunteered to locate the sites of way stations on the route to the Forks of the Ohio on the company's behalf.)[30] Lawrence's death in 1752 propelled George to greater participation in the development of the West. Although not yet a member of the Ohio Company—his sister-in-law, not he, inherited Lawrence's share—he had a family interest to protect. That private concern in turn created the opportunity he longed for: to serve the interests of his province and prove himself a public-spirited gentleman worthy of membership in Virginia's elite. All he had to do was to accept an offer that Virginia's lieutenant governor made in the fall of 1753.

Because Governor Lord Albemarle had not the slightest desire ever to set foot in Virginia, he assigned the office of lieutenant governor, in 1751, to an ambitious Scottish merchant and midlevel imperial bureaucrat, Robert Dinwiddie. By 1752 Dinwiddie had acquired a share in the Ohio Company and with it a keen interest in promoting colonization beyond the Alleghenies. Both as a representative of the crown and as a man with investments to defend, Dinwiddie looked with concern on reports that the French had begun to build forts on Lake Erie and the Allegheny River. It seemed obvious that they intended to assert direct control over the entire Ohio Valley, ground that he knew was rightfully Virginia's and now (at least in part) his own.

Dinwiddie reported these French "encroachments" to his superiors in London, where ministers sympathetic to his views authorized him to take vigorous measures, including the construction of his own forts and—if necessary—the use of force, to preserve the integrity of His Majesty's dominions. Because the ministers' instructions also forbade him to act as an aggressor, Dinwiddie decided in the fall of 1753 that he must first send a letter to the French commander on the Allegheny, demanding that he leave British territory forthwith. If the French refused, he he would begin a fort-building program of his own to secure Virginia's claims to the upper Ohio Valley. Should the French then choose to contest those claims, Dinwiddie regarded his instructions as authorizing him to take military measures against them.[31]

Washington was the obvious choice to carry this message to the French. At twenty-one he was old enough to hold positions of public trust—the Council had recently made him adjutant general of the militia of the province south of the James River, with the rank of major—yet young and

strong enough to undertake an arduous journey. His eagerness to serve the province was evident and genuine, and he relished a chance to see the Ohio country. That he spoke neither French nor any Indian language, had little formal education, knew nothing of native cultures, and utterly lacked diplomatic experience were not obstacles. Indeed, his evident *lack* of qualifications commended him for a job that Dinwiddie publicly described as "express Messenger." Because he looked so much like an errand boy, he was all the better suited to fulfill the governor's private instructions to gather information about "the Numbers & Force of the French on the Ohio, & the adjacent Country."[32] Washington's role as courier, in other words, furnished a cover for his more critical task of gathering intelligence on a potential enemy. He would be not only the governor's emissary but his spy.

Between his departure on November 1, 1753, and his return to Williamsburg from a cold, wet, and dangerous journey in mid-January 1754, Washington traversed more than 500 miles by horse, foot, canoe, and raft, delivered Dinwiddie's letter, secured the French reply, and gathered the first reliable intelligence the British had about the situation west of the Alleghenies. The picture was far from encouraging.

The French, Washington reported, had constructed three forts along waterways from Presque Isle on the southeast shore of Lake Erie to the confluence of the Rivière aux Bœufs and the Allegheny at Venango. He had found the regional commandant at the middle post, Fort Le Bœuf. Captain Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre had received him with impeccable politesse but showed no disposition to make the "peaceable departure" that Dinwiddie's letter demanded. Washington had, moreover, seen unmistakable evidence of French intentions to move downriver with the spring freshets to the Forks of the Ohio. He and his companions had counted more than 200 canoes and bateaux on the banks of the Rivière aux Bœufs and its tributary creeks. Many more under construction, lay nearby.[33]

Indian relations also looked unpromising, but Washington knew too little of Indian cultures to realize just how shaky they were. Most of the natives living along in the upper Ohio and its tributaries were Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingo Senecas, all of them, the English thought, subordinates of the Iroquois League, governed by headmen whom the Great Council at Onondaga had appointed as its regents. Near the Forks of the Ohio, Washington met two of these regents, the Seneca Tanaghrisson (the "Half King" who was supposed to speak for the Delawares) and the Oneida Scarouady (Onondaga's spokesman for the Shawnees). Both chiefs assured him that they would join Virginia in demanding that the French leave the territory,

but when the time came to travel from the Forks to the French posts, only Tanaghrisson and three Mingo warriors accompanied Washington's party.

Washington failed to understand that no matter what Tanaghrisson had told them, the French interpreted his escort's puny size and lack of diversity as evidence that the Delawares and Shawnees were uninterested in following the Half King's lead to support the British.[34] Even Washington could understand, however, that if Virginia did not establish a powerful presence at the Forks of the Ohio before the French, in the spring or early summer of 1754, an alliance with the region's Indians would be stillborn. Dinwiddie concurred. He moved immediately to send a small expedition to construct a fort at the Forks and asked the House of Burgesses to authorize a regiment of volunteers to secure command of the Ohio.

Washington let it be known that he would gladly accept an appointment in the force that was to be raised. The command of the regiment would obviously have to go to an experienced officer, but the post of lieutenant colonel, or second in command, was one for which he felt qualified. By March 20, 1754, thanks to Fairfax's influence and Dinwiddie's goodwill, he had his wish, and his commission.

It was a moment of fulfillment. A decade after his father's death left him a boy with limited prospects, Washington had grown into a young gentleman with skills and patrons and lands and an office in which he could demonstrate his capacity for public service and earn the reputation he coveted. Everything suggested that he stood at the threshold of even greater accomplishments: military glory and a place of leadership in colonizing a new western realm. He threw himself into recruiting, equipping, training, and supplying his regiment's soldiers, hiring or impressing the wagons and horses necessary for an expedition to the Ohio, making ready to march at the earliest possible moment. With the self-confidence of the truly ignorant, he pressed relentlessly on, driven by a ferocious determination to prove himself.[35]

On April 18 Washington was camped with about 160 men at Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley, eager to march for the Forks of the Ohio, where an advanced detachment was building the stockade he expected to defend against the French. Four days later, at the Ohio Company's fortified storehouse on the upper Potomac, where he was awaiting more troops, he was surprised to see the officer who was supposed to be building the fort at the Forks ride up. The French, he now learned, had arrived on April 17, a thousand strong with eighteen pieces of artillery. Unable to resist this overwhelming force, Virginia's construction crew had surrendered their recently completed fort.[36]

Lieutenant Colonel Washington listened carefully, made the necessary reports to his superiors, and ordered his men to make ready to march for the Forks. With only the foggiest notion of what he could do and no idea of where it would lead, George Washington committed himself to the imperial mission that defined the rest of his life and opened a new epoch in North American history.

The Collision of Empires

Something clearly began early in the morning of May 28, 1754, when forty men under Washington's command attacked a detachment of Canadian militiamen who were escorting an officer of the *Troupes de la Marine* on a diplomatic mission: an effort to find the Virginians and urge them to leave the Ohio country in peace. The killing of Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville and twelve of his men brought severe retaliation a month later when Jumonville's older brother led a French and Indian force against the Virginia regiment at its hastily constructed palisade, Fort Necessity. It was the first of many defeats that Washington suffered in his long career as a soldier. Yet on the day that he and the survivors of the Virginia Regiment abandoned Fort Necessity—July 4, 1754—it was far from clear that what had begun would develop into a new Anglo-French war.

The actions of the young Washington, eager to prove himself and bold to the point of foolhardiness, sparked a cataclysm long in the making. In the early 1750s, the lands that lay between the Forks of the Ohio and the Mississippi became the focus of the hopes and fears of groups that included Indians in the region, colonists from Quebec to Savannah, and government ministers at Whitehall and Versailles. Both the French and British governments believed that the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle had created little more than an armistice in the interminable conflict between their nations. Each imperial administration construed its own intrusion into the Ohio country as a defensive measure necessitated by the aggressions of the other. Neither they nor the North American colonists, however, understood that the most important reason behind the Anglo-French confrontation was the striving of Indian peoples on the upper Ohio for independence.

The Delawares, Shawnees, Mingo Senecas, and other Indians who lived in the Allegheny and Ohio valleys numbered more than 2,500 by the middle of the 1740s.[37] Having fled westward to escape the growing numbers of land-hungry Pennsylvanians, they had every reason to think that their location between the French and British empires would make it possible to pursue strategies similar to those of the Abenakis, the Iroquois League, the Algonquians of the *pays d'en haut*, the Cherokees, the Creeks, and the Choctaws. They would play off one imperial power against another to ensure their access to trade goods, stimulate the giving of diplomatic gifts, and, by the creation of judicious counterbalancing alliances with both European powers, free themselves from Iroquois domination.

The Indians of the Ohio Valley were more determinedly independent-minded than Europeans, or the Iroquois for that matter, supposed. The Mingos, as the westernmost branch of the Seneca people were known, were of course Iroquois, but the League Council at Onondaga regarded them as hunters temporarily absent from their homeland who had no more right to speak for themselves than the Delawares or the Shawnees. In truth, however, the Mingos were the most independent-minded subgroup of the Seneca nation. Largely descendants of Eries, Neutrals, Monongahelas, and other peoples destroyed in the Beaver Wars, they saw their return to the Ohio country as an opportunity to reestablish communities on ancestral ground. They were far more ready to follow their own counsel than Onondaga's directives.[38]

A number of Pennsylvania traders, eager to compete for the skins and pelts that the Ohio Indians could furnish, had followed the Delawares and Shawnees west. The traders' presence helped sustain the Indians' dream of independent life. The most important was an irrepressible Irishman, George Croghan, who began trading west of the Alleghenies in the early 1740s in competition against James Logan's long-established network. Croghan and his associates succeeded in establishing a successful trading post at Logstown on the Ohio below the Forks, then extended their trading network west down the Ohio and northwestward to Lake Erie, where they built a post at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River in 1743. Attracted by the high quality and comparatively low prices of British goods, Indians flocked to Croghan's posts.

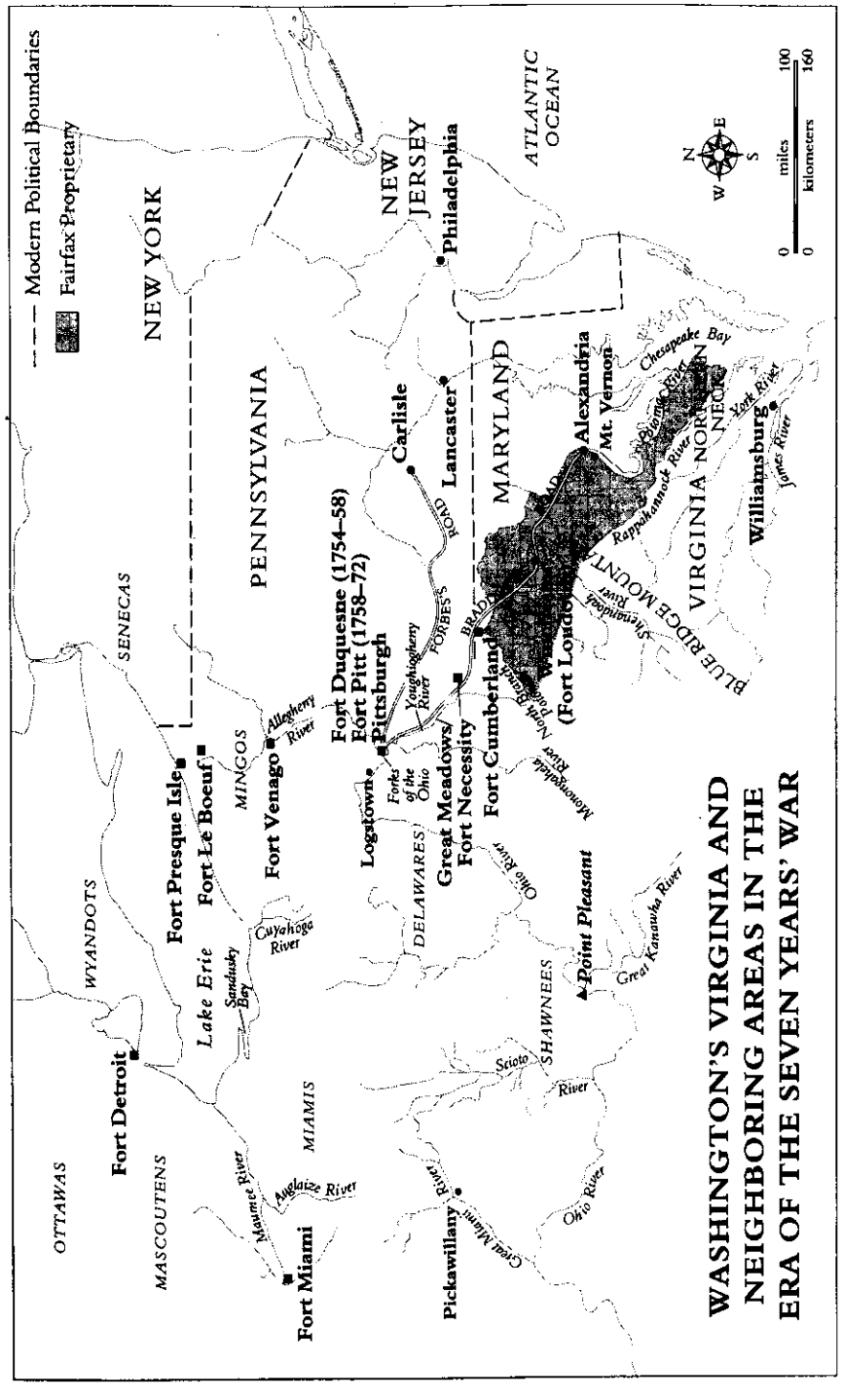
The weakness of the French and the larger threat to the balance of power in the interior of eastern North America posed by the Pennsylvania traders became unmistakable with the outbreak of King George's War (1744–48; the New World phase of the longer War of the Austrian Succession, 1740–48). King George's War broke the mold of previous European conflicts played out in North America when the New England colonies mounted a successful expedition against the French fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island in 1745 and seized control of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. Sealed off from communication with Europe, Canada soon faced severe shortages of trade goods, and the government of New France was

forced to curtail diplomatic gift-giving. Croghan and his associates rushed in to fill the vacuum. By 1747, he was trading with French-allied Wyandots on Lake Erie's Sandusky Bay, scarcely fifty miles south of France's great western entrepôt, Fort Detroit.[39] New France managed to maintain its Indian alliances and hence to survive the war only because the merchants of Albany saw the opportunity to gain access to Canada's fur supply and obligingly smuggled trade goods to Montreal by way of Lake Champlain. Had the New Yorkers not preferred pelts to patriotism, New France would have lost all of its Indian allies and Canada would have been left defenseless.

The relatively inexpensive British goods that Croghan and his fellow traders offered at Logstown and other western posts during the war had attenuated the Ohio Indians' ties to the French—a situation that the return of peace in 1748 did not change. Croghan merely shifted his activities from Lake Erie to a new trading post at Pickawillany on the upper Great Miami River, which was soon crowded with formerly French-allied Indians from both the *pays d'en haut* and the *pays des Illinois*. Canadian officials, linking Croghan's predatory trading behavior with Virginians' increasing interest in the Forks of the Ohio, saw nothing less than a concerted effort to drive a wedge into the heart of their empire.[40] Since 1701 the French had trusted the Iroquois League to keep English traders out of the trans-Allegheny west, and had been more than willing to recognize Iroquois claims to the Ohio Valley as a *quid pro quo*. That policy was obviously no longer viable; something had to be done before English goods (and worst of all, settlers) poured into the *pays d'en haut*.

The French responded by trying to establish diplomatic and military hegemony over the Ohio country. In 1749 the governor-general of New France put Captain Pierre-Joseph Céloron de Blainville at the head of an expedition down the Ohio River in an attempt to demonstrate the French determination to claim the region. He failed to accomplish that goal when the Indians for the most part ignored him; accordingly, in 1752 the French dispatched an Ottawa and Chippewa force from Detroit to destroy Croghan's trade emporium at Pickawillany. Yet even that dramatic act only temporarily deterred the Pennsylvanians and Virginians from meddling in the Ohio Valley.

Lacking effective commercial countermeasures, in 1753 the French began building forts from Lake Erie to the Allegheny Valley with a view to constructing a permanent trading post at the Forks of the Ohio. The goal was twofold: to exclude the English from the Ohio country and to secure the trade and allegiance of the Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingos. This was a desperate gamble, for it required the French to dismiss the Iroquois claim



to the Ohio as a sham and also to spend a great deal of money to sustain trade in a remote, probably unprofitable, region.[41]

All this maneuvering provided the local context for Dinwiddie's demand that the French evacuate the Allegheny-Ohio drainage in 1753, Washington's fumbling attempts to remove them in 1754, and an Atlantic world that hung on the brink of war at the beginning of 1755. The Seven Years' War was a far-flung affair, even in its origins. Without decisions in both Britain and France to dispatch regular troops to defend their colonial frontiers in 1755; without the completion of a Diplomatic Revolution that aligned Britain with Prussia (formerly the ally of France) against France and Austria (formerly the ally of Britain) at the beginning of 1756; without France's seizure of Minorca from British control in May of that year; and—most of all—without the eruption of a European war when Britain's ally Frederick the Great of Prussia invaded the Saxon territory of France's ally Austria in August: without these interlocking, pyramiding events, the backwoods bloodshed Washington precipitated might have remained a merely provincial affair.[42]

Yet more unforeseeable developments were necessary to make the European conflict a worldwide war, notably the ascent of William Pitt to the leadership of Britain's House of Commons and his entry into a surprisingly durable political alliance with a former enemy, the Duke of Newcastle, which lasted from the summer of 1757 through the fall of 1761. The role that Washington played in the war and the impact of that the conflict had on North America and its peoples as a whole can be understood only in the context of the war's wider developments. The best way to grasp the character of the war's larger dimensions is to begin with Pitt himself.

If megalomania can be an adaptive quality in wartime political leaders, England could scarcely have produced a man more superbly equipped to lead it in the Seven Years' War than William Pitt. He was eloquent, fiercely energetic, able to recognize talent in subordinates, capable of conceiving a grand strategy by which the destruction of the French overseas empire would break the back of French power in Europe, and prepared to pursue that course with flexibility and opportunism. All of those qualities worked together because Pitt's heartfelt conviction that he was his country's savior enabled him to sound like destiny's mouthpiece. In Parliament the backbenchers believed in him and voted with him; in coffeehouses and public houses Britons hungry for imperial glory read accounts of far-flung military operations and gave him the credit for the victories gained.

So great was Pitt's identification with the war that the conflict in North America can be periodized according to his presence or absence from

power. Early in the war, before he and Newcastle consolidated their alliance, Whitehall's policies centered on trying to fight the American war with American resources, under the direction of commanders in chief with virtually viceregal powers. This policy produced nothing but discord and disaster. Two stiff-necked commanders in chief—General Edward Braddock and General John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun—so alienated the colonial governments by their peremptory demands for support that by the end of 1757 the British war effort in America had all but ground to a halt. Once the Pitt-Newcastle ministry took control of the House of Commons, however, Whitehall reversed its centralizing policy toward the colonies. In the last days of 1757 Pitt recalled the unpopular Lord Loudoun and repudiated Loudoun's insistence that colonial governments submit unconditionally to royal authority. Then, in a total reversal of course, he invited the colonists to join—voluntarily—in a grand imperial adventure.

Rather than demanding that the colonies pay for a war effort they did not direct and could not afford, Pitt promised colonial legislatures reimbursements in proportion to the monies they expended and the numbers of men they raised for the campaigns. Aware of the alienation that Loudoun had caused, he revoked the authority of the commander in chief over civilian governments and took care to phrase the crown's requirements for troops and money as requests, not commands, to the colonial assemblies. Between 1758 and 1760, policies that in effect treated the colonies as allies generated popular enthusiasm and mobilized colonial resources to a degree that would have been inconceivable in 1755–57, when the commanders in chief had tried to reduce the colonies to auxiliaries subject to imperial command. The wartime success of the British empire in North America, in other words, was directly proportional to the crown's willingness to reimburse colonial governments for their participation and inversely related to metropolitan efforts to exert direct authority over the colonies.

Something quite similar can be said for the French, who enjoyed their greatest successes early in the war when they followed the traditional Canadian policy of giving native allies free rein to attack the Anglo-American frontiers according to their own traditions of warmaking. That highly successful strategy, however, was based on what seemed a capitulation to savagery to the marquis de Montcalm, the eminently sophisticated and civilized general whom Versailles sent to direct the war effort in 1756. An episode of massacre and captive-taking at the siege of Fort Oswego in that year left Montcalm determined to turn the Indians from allies into obedient auxiliaries in the next campaign. His efforts to implement those policies and

bring an end to *la guerre sauvage* in 1757 created a sense of betrayal in his allies and precipitated the so-called Massacre of Fort William Henry, in which about 500 members of the fort's surrendered garrison were killed or taken captive. Some Indian groups (mostly Catholics who lived on *reserves* in the Saint Lawrence Valley) did not abandon the French, but the great majority of France's erstwhile native allies went home disgusted at the end of the 1757 campaign, never to return. This left the Canadian militia, the colony regulars (Troupes de la Marine), and French regular forces *(Troupes de Terre)* with an impossible task: in 1758 and after, they had to defend Canada against an increasingly mobilized and enthusiastic Anglo-American enemy that outnumbered them by eighteen to one.[43]

The metropolitan French, if not the Canadians, had forgotten the lesson that Champlain learned at such cost: without Indian allies they had no hope of defending New France. Their success as an imperial power in North America depended on accommodation with, not dominion over, the native peoples. Once the British navy succeeded in crippling France's Atlantic fleet and preventing merchant vessels from resupplying Canada with arms, provisions, and trade goods, the cause became hopeless. By late 1758 the Indians of the Ohio country understood that the French were no longer able to maintain their western forts and made a separate peace. Anglo-American forces invaded the Canadian heartland in the following year, taking Quebec in September. When the British navy defeated the last effective French squadron on the Atlantic at the Battle of Quiberon Bay in November 1759, Versailles wrote Canada off as lost. Canada's defenders held out until the late summer of 1760 but did so in the knowledge that France's empire in North America had reached its end.[44]

The tide of successes that buoyed Britain's war effort in America from 1758 onward had its counterpart in British operations in India. After a shaky start in 1756, the army of the East India Company under a clerk turned soldier, Robert Clive, cooperated with a regiment of redcoats and the Royal Navy to sweep French troops and commercial interests from the subcontinent. Although the war in Europe continued indecisively, the successes of British operations against the French empire made Pitt fantastically popular and politically invulnerable—until King George II died in October 1760. His grandson and successor, the idealistic, dutiful, and immature George III, wanted very much to end the war and hoped to replace Pitt, whom he distrusted, with his tutor Lord Bute, whom he loved.

Pitt, however, could not be thrust from office so easily, so the war dragged on, draining the treasuries of the belligerent powers. Meanwhile,

Spain's new king, Charles III, became increasingly uneasy about its possible result. Spain, although ruled by a branch of the same family that controlled the French throne, had initially remained aloof from the war under the timid Ferdinand VI. After Charles ascended the crown in 1759, he watched Britain win victory after victory in North America and worried that if France bought a peace by surrendering its New World possessions to Britain, Spain's empire would become Pitt's next target. To insure that France would not make a separate peace, therefore, Spain offered an alliance with a secret codicil promising to enter the war against Britain in May 1762. Pitt, who learned of this plan through intercepted diplomatic correspondence, insisted on launching a preemptive war against Spain but found that neither the cabinet nor the court would support such a move. His resignation from the government in October 1761 brought on the war's final phase.

Instead of the immediate peace that George III hoped for, however, British forces in the New World responded to Spain's entry into the war in 1762 with an invasion of Cuba, taking Havana after a siege that lasted from June 8 through August 13. Both Spain and France now desperately needed to negotiate a peace, and George III and Lord Bute, who had taken over as prime minister after Pitt's resignation, finally succeeded in bringing the war to an end. The preliminary articles of the peace treaty were agreed at Paris on November 3, 1763. It was another half year before news arrived in Europe that even as the finishing touches were being put to the agreement, an improvised British expedition from India had captured Manila and taken control of the Spanish Philippines.

The Peace of Paris (February 10, 1763) confirmed the most decisive military victory the British had ever won and gave Great Britain possession of North America from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico: a region far too vast to be controlled by the haphazard means previously employed to govern the empire. Pitt's openhanded subsidies, meanwhile, had nearly doubled the kingdom's public debt, even as his emphasis on voluntarism had convinced the American colonists that they were partners in the greatest imperial enterprise since Rome. The war left France, on the other hand, to bear a burden of humiliation greater even than its heavy public debt and created an unquenchable desire for revenge; left Spain determined to modernize and strengthen its severely shaken empire and keep control of the colonial silver on which the royal treasury depended; and left the courts of Europe to wonder if an apparently invincible Britain would seek to parlay its naval and military preeminence into hegemony over the Continent. The greatest conflict since the Thirty Years' War

thus created an extremely volatile political situation in Europe, an unstable mixture that needed only a spark to ignite it.

When the explosion came, just a dozen years after the Peace of Paris, it happened once again in North America. To understand how and why that revolutionary detonation occurred as it did when it did, we must focus more closely on the specific effects of the Seven Years' War on the British colonies and especially on the experiences of George Washington. In one way or another, he applied the lessons the war taught him for the rest of his life.

Lessons Learned

Robert Dinwiddie was fond of the eager young man who carried his ultimatum to the French commander on the Allegheny in 1753 and believed strongly enough in his courage and skill to appoint Washington as lieutenant colonel of the Virginia Regiment in 1754. He had not intended for Washington to command the regiment, however; he entrusted that far graver responsibility to an older and more experienced man, the Oxford-educated mathematician and cartographer Colonel Joshua Fry. Subordinate status suited Washington well. For all his ambition, he was acutely aware of his lack of experience and expertise as a soldier, and longed to be "under the Command off [*sic*] an experienced Officer and a Man of Sense."[45] This was undoubtedly never more true than when Tanaghrisson, the Seneca Half King, induced him to attack the detachment of Ensign Jumonville, who (as Washington did not realize) had been sent to warn the Virginians leave the region. Tanaghrisson, rejected by the Delawares over whom he was supposed to exercise the authority of the Six Nations, desperately needed an ally to support him in ejecting the French from the newly built Fort Duquesne and regaining control over the Forks of the Ohio. It was only following the brief and confused firefight between the Virginians and the surprised Canadians on May 28, 1754, when Tanaghrisson smashed Jumonville's skull open with a hatchet and his warriors slaughtered a dozen wounded militiamen from Jumonville's escort, that Washington realized that the Half King had his own notions of how to forge an unbreakable alliance with the English. Washington realized too late that he had been Tanaghrisson's sole remaining asset in a desperate gamble to reclaim the Ohio country for the Iroquois League.[46]

Washington therefore felt his lack of experience all the more keenly when he learned on June 9 that Colonel Fry had fallen from his horse and

died on the last day of May. Soon thereafter Dinwiddie, with little in the way of alternatives, promoted Washington—a man the age of a modern second lieutenant and with a great deal less training—to the rank of colonel, making him commandant of the Virginia Regiment. It was not the first time Washington had advanced by the untimely death of someone above him in the social hierarchy. It was, however, incomparably the most important to his province and to the empire he hoped to serve.[47]

Tanaghrisson soon realized that he had overestimated a man whose value as an ally was, in fact, nil. As much an innocent in war as diplomacy, Washington refused to take advice on matters in which the Half King was far more experienced than he. Thus he sited a hastily constructed fort—the only defense the Virginia regiment had against the retaliatory attack that the French were sure to mount—at the upper end of the Great Meadows, a boggy expanse of grassland beneath a wooded hill. The stockade that Washington named Fort Necessity and Tanaghrisson dismissed as "that little thing upon the Meadow"[48] was so obviously indefensible that the Half King gave up and left, along with his followers, before a powerful French and Indian force attacked on the morning of July 3, 1754. By sunset that day, Washington had lost a third of his men, killed and wounded. He might have suffered worse had not the French commander, Captain Louis Coulon de Villiers, offered him the opportunity to surrender in return for a promise to withdraw his men over the mountains and not return. Washington did not understand until months had passed that the instrument of surrender he signed (a document written in French, a language he could not read) contained a clause in which he admitted "assassinating" Ensign Jumonville.[49]

Jumonville's murder and the subsequent disaster at Fort Necessity taught Washington the first lessons he learned as a soldier of the king, an arduous five-year-long education in arms.[50] Though he learned by trial and error and as a result made terrible mistakes, he also learned never to make the same mistakes again. As with the notions of gentility he acquired by studying Lawrence and the Fairfaxes, he made his greatest strides by observing British professional officers in action, absorbing their attitudes and prejudices along with their expertise. Their missteps proved no less instructive than their successes.

Washington returned to western Pennsylvania in the summer of 1755 as an aide-de-camp to General Edward Braddock, riding beside him throughout the Battle of the Monongahela on July 9, 1755. On that terrible day, he witnessed the wounding or death of two-thirds of Braddock's 1,373-man command by an Indian force less than half its size and saw unmistakably

illustrated the perils of campaigning deep in the wilderness too far from a secure base of supply and without native allies. Yet Washington never ceased to admire the general for his courage and professionalism; indeed, he kept mementos the dying Braddock gave him—his sash and pistols—for the rest of his life. Like talismans, he carried them on every subsequent campaign.

From Lord Loudoun, to whom Washington suggested in March 1757 that the Virginia Regiment be made a unit of the British army with royal commissions for its officers, he learned other lessons.[51] In Loudoun's dismissive response Washington could not have helped but sense the disdain of a man further above him in military and social rank than anyone he had ever encountered. It is impossible to imagine that Washington, who cared so much about his reputation, did not deeply feel the humiliation of learning that the commander in chief regarded him as merely another amateurish provincial officer. At any rate Washington, who had sought a commission from Braddock in 1755, never again solicited rank for himself in the British army. To be humbled one more time would have been too much to bear.

He also discovered, in the counterproductive results of Loudoun's determination to teach the colonial assemblies their duty, the folly of believing that civil authorities could be despised, coerced, or trifled with. This was a truth that did not come instinctively to Washington, who privately criticized the Burgesses and Councillors of Virginia as "Chimney Corner Politicians" too devoted to ease and too fearful of public censure to support their own province's regiment adequately.[52] His conviction that no military end could be accomplished without the support of civilian authority became the source of his greatest strength in the Revolutionary era; in the Seven Years' War lay the beginnings of that realization.

Washington's participation in the Forbes campaign of 1758, in which an Anglo-American force built forts and a military road west across Pennsylvania to eject the French from Fort Duquesne, brought him into contact with two extraordinary redcoat officers. In Colonel Henry Bouquet of the Royal American Regiment he met a man whose skills as an administrator enabled him to control and sustain thousands of soldiers, laborers, support personnel, and camp followers as they carved 150 miles of road through the woods, all the while maintaining security against French and Indian raids. Washington also saw in Bouquet's decision to allow Major James Grant to undertake a raid on Fort Duquesne without adequate support, his flaw as a commander: experience and prudence could not keep Bouquet from allowing himself to be seduced by the hope of dealing the enemy a quick, decisive blow.

That nothing worse came of Major Grant's September 14 fiasco, a smaller-scale recapitulation of Braddock's defeat, was due mostly to the overwhelming strength and superb organization of the larger force of which Bouquet's was the advance element. That in turn could be credited to General John Forbes, the expedition's commander. In Forbes, Washington saw virtually all of the positive qualities of command combined: deference to higher authority and cooperation with Pennsylvania's government, systematic attention to issues of logistics and communication and security, and (above all) patience in cultivating diplomatic relations with Indians. The latter was the key to the whole. Because Forbes never made Braddock's mistake of scorning the Indians as mere savages, it proved possible in late 1758 to detach the Delawares and other peoples on the Ohio from the French alliance by negotiation, thus forcing the abandonment of Fort Duquesne. And there was another quality to admire in Forbes, too: the moral courage of a man who, though slowly, painfully dying from what may have been stomach cancer, continued to pursue his mission with a dedication that overshadowed even Braddock's physical bravery under fire.[53]

Thanks to his ability to profit from careful observation and his relentless dedication to self-improvement, Washington came to understand very well the qualities and skills it took to administer an army regiment. By the time he resigned his commission at the end of the 1758, he knew, perhaps better than any other provincial colonel in North America, how to train, feed, house, clothe, discipline, and control a thousand men in garrisons, on patrols, and on the march. It was a vast distance to travel for a man of whom no better could have been said in the spring of 1754 than that he was ambitious, earnest, brave, and callow. This is *not* to say that by the end of the war he had perfected the virtues that later sustained him as a Revolutionary general. Especially in the crucial matter of deference to civil authority—which he initially regarded as essentially an irritant and about which he never ceased to complain—he grew a good deal further, when as a man in his forties he faced challenges far more severe than those of his twenties. Unlike most men, Washington's capacity for adaptation—his ability to learn by trial and error, observation and precept—did not atrophy as he aged. The lessons he first absorbed under the terrible pressures of war in the 1750s became the basis of truly remarkable achievements in the 1770s and beyond.

The nasty little war that Washington endured on the Virginia frontier mattered little in the grand strategy of the Seven Years' War, but it made him both a mature man and a competent military commander. It was a conflict in which he had to fight enemies accustomed to forest warfare in ways that he and his men could never be, foes so elusive that his troops almost never came

to grips with them except when they found themselves trapped in ambushes or subjected to surprise attacks. At the same time Washington had to overcome the almost equally daunting obstacles that his fellow colonists erected. Until the campaign of 1758, the provincial government of Virginia never gave his regiment sufficient money or supplies to carry out its mission. Only when Pitt's promise of reimbursement freed it of the fear of bankruptcy did the House of Burgesses authorize an enlistment bounty large enough to attract adequate numbers of recruits. Before that, Washington's regiment was chronically understrength, composed of whatever vagabonds, outcasts, and rogues could be coerced into service, together with the usual quantum of adventurers and whatever impoverished men might be moved to volunteer by the promise of a modest land grant and a wage that equaled about half of what a day laborer might earn.[54] Meanwhile, the young colonel had to cope with floods of refugees driven from their homes; with anxious, angry, and recalcitrant local populations whose ideas of defense ran directly opposite his own; and with militiamen who generally responded to his appeals too late, in inadequate numbers, and without the arms and equipment they needed to perform the tasks he demanded of them.

Given all this, the unattractive features so prominent in Washington's behavior during this period—his continual complaints about lack of support, his repeated threats to resign, his efforts to go around Governor Dinwiddie to influence the Speaker of the House of Burgesses to support the regiment more generously (a tactic that finally moved Dinwiddie to break with him in 1757)—become more understandable, for they were ultimately driven by his desire to improve his regiment's miserable lot. Lack of success led him, however unwillingly, to adapt creatively to circumstances he could not escape. Knowing that the disruptions along the frontier resulted directly from raids launched from Fort Duquesne and the Indian villages of the Allegheny and upper Ohio valleys, he determined to improve the one resource he had—the regiment—by making it the most effective possible fighting force and husbanding its strength against the day he could take it west over Braddock's Road and strike at the root of the evil. To that end, he undertook an ambitious program of training and discipline for his men, exerting his authority with great rigor in the hope of making his shabby and undermanned unit the closest possible approximation of a redcoat battalion. He studied the leading military manuals of the day (especially Humphrey Bland's *Treatise of Military Discipline*), read such classics as were available in translation (Caesar's *Commentaries* was a favorite), and urged his officers to do the same. He also sought

advice from officers he admired, especially Bouquet and Forbes, and strove in every way he could to build esprit de corps.[55]

Washington was reluctant to scatter his men in the forts that he located up and down the length of the Shenandoah Valley because to do so prevented him from instilling the discipline, training, and élan he thought essential for the regiment. He therefore resolved to concentrate as many men as possible at Fort Cumberland (the starting point of Braddock's Road, on the upper Potomac) and at Fort Loudoun (his headquarters at Winchester, the largest settlement in the northern Shenandoah) and to use local militiamen to garrison the outlying posts. He had a hard time doing even that. Rather than relocate to the province's strategically located forts and blockhouses, the majority of the backcountry settlers who elected not to flee the region "sought shelter in paltry forts (of their own building)" even though they were "destitute of the common supports of life."[56] These forts were generally stone houses that had been built before the war; the local militiamen had enclosed them in "small stockade" enclosures sufficient to shelter the local farmers, their families, and their animals in case of an attack.[57] Militiamen clung to these posts, inadequate as they were, because their first commitment was to defend the family members and neighbors who took shelter in them. As Washington found, to his intense frustration, they would obey his orders to turn out in order to pursue enemy attackers or garrison the larger, better supplied, and geographically vital provincial blockhouses only when they believed it was in the interests of their communities to do so.

Washington came to regard localism and the readiness of the militia to disobey him that went along with it as enemies no less pernicious than Indian war parties. He had not thought highly of the frontier settlers when he was a surveyor; now, intent on proving his own virtuous character as a servant of the crown, he responded to their parochialism by becoming even more self-consciously cosmopolitan. He became ever more convinced that military leaders must be gentlemen who, like himself, were capable of seeing beyond the interests of the locality to the greater welfare of the commonwealth and who would willingly sacrifice their fortunes and lives when called upon to do so.[58] In this context it becomes clear that his desire for a royal commission for himself and a place on the British establishment for his regiment reflected his reaction to the lack of resources at his command and the backwoodsmen's lack of deference to his authority. Until his final rebuff by Lord Loudoun in early 1757, he clung to the illusion that the uniform somehow makes the man and that a closer connection to imperial

authority would enable him to overcome the resistance of the small-minded, self-interested frontiersmen and their families.

And yet despite his persistent frustration and his near-disastrous breach with Dinwiddie in the spring of 1757, Washington never carried through with his threats to resign until the Anglo-Americans had driven the French from Fort Duquesne and stabilized the Virginia-Pennsylvania frontier. In part he refrained for fear of damaging the public reputation he valued so highly. Ultimately, however, he remained with his regiment because, as the war went on, his loyalty to those whom he commanded deepened, and they responded with respect and regard for him as their leader. This motivating sense of shared identity and mission—what modern military sociologists call "unit cohesion"—gradually increased until during the campaign of 1758, Washington's regiment demonstrated such spirit, discipline, and proficiency that even regular officers and soldiers praised it. Such acceptance by the professional soldiers to whom he looked up was a matter of great moment to him and of pride for the soldiers in the regiment's ranks.[59] When he resigned his commission in December, the company officers—captains and lieutenants, who lived in closest contact with the men—wrote him a heartfelt address, thanking him for the care he had shown in teaching them to be "good Troops," lamenting "the loss of such an excellent Commander, such a sincere Friend, and so affable a Companion," and asking him to remain in command another year "to lead us on . . . in compleating the Glorious Work of extirpating our Enemies."[60] His reply, equally sincere, acknowledged "the pangs I have felt at parting with a Regiment, that has shared my toils, and experienced every hardship & danger, which I have encountered." "I thank you," he wrote, "for the love & regard you have all along shewn me. It is in this, I am rewarded. It is herein I glory."[61]

The ability to form bonds of mutual regard with subordinates suggests a capacity for empathy that had not distinguished Washington at the outset of the war, when self-regard, even vanity, was a defining characteristic in his personality. In maturing as a man and a commander, he had grown in other ways as well, most notably in his ability to appreciate the importance of Indians in fighting the war. In 1754 he had disdained them and as a consequence suffered grievously for it at Fort Necessity. In the following year he had seen the most powerful military force in North America cut to shreds as a result of Braddock's dismissive attitude toward Indian warriors. In 1756 and 1757, as his regiment and the militia garrisons up and down the frontier reeled under the blows of Shawnees and other French-allied raiders, he had come to understand that his only realistic hope of retaliation depended on

persuading Cherokee, Catawba, Nottoway, and other warriors to launch raids on behalf of the Virginians. In 1758 he saw that Forbes's use of Indian diplomacy allowed him to detach the Delawares and Shawnees from the French alliance and thus take Fort Duquesne without a shot fired.

Though Washington never came to admire Indians or to see them as human beings equal in dignity and worth to himself and other Euro-Americans, he did not let the war make him an Indian-hater, as it did so many backwoods settlers. He never endorsed the view that the only good Indian was a dead one; never subscribed to the backwoodsmen's preferred solution to Indian-white relations, which came down to exclusion or genocide. Instead, Washington learned to see Indians as necessary in rendering the frontier secure and thus worth the expense it took to feed and supply them. As allies, Indians could be troublesome enough, and he always remained capable of condemning them as "insolent, . . . avaricious, and . . . dissatisfied wretches"; as enemies, however, even small numbers of them could make the frontier uninhabitable.[62] The path of intercultural accommodation, however difficult, was obviously the path of prudence.

Even as these realizations were changing his attitudes and shaping his character, the war was transforming the Shenandoah Valley, and with it Washington's views of the future of the backcountry. At the outset of the war, the valley's settlements were dispersed in open-country neighborhoods, just as those of the Virginia Tidewater and Piedmont were. The largest Shenandoah settlement, Winchester (originally known as Frederick Town), boasted barely sixty houses. Washington's decision to locate his headquarters there and concentrate as many of his troops at Fort Loudoun on the hilltop overlooking the town caused the place to grow. By the end of the war it was fully half the size of Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia, and one of the colony's larger settlements.

War made Winchester prosper. The demand for beef to feed the regiment's soldiers and fodder to feed its livestock encouraged local farmers to produce surpluses for sale on an unprecedented scale. Prosperity in turn attracted retailers to town. Merchants in Philadelphia supplied them with dry goods and provided the credit that turned the Shenandoah Valley into the southernmost outpost of the city's commercial hinterland. The population of the Shenandoah grew from about 10,000 in 1748 to about 25,000 in 1760, at which point the settlers began to push beyond it to the west and south.[63]

Washington, already a prominent landowner in the valley, watched all this happening and from it derived a notion of how frontiers should be organized. The farmers around Winchester became in his mind a model for

farmers located around market towns that linked the backcountry to coastal cities and their merchants. Such settlers were eager consumers of goods produced in England and Europe, and their appetites for manufactures made them industrious in a way that more remote subsistence farmers—the localist militiamen who so often refused to respond to his orders—were not. This preference for commercial development and urbanization set Washington apart from most of his fellow planters and land speculators, who saw no advantage in promoting the growth of towns that could potentially compete with the influence of the county gentry. They did not share his perspective because, in the comfort and safety of their Tidewater plantations, they had not seen what the war had shown him: that compact settlements were not only more defensible but directly tied to the wider Atlantic world. The economic self-interest of settlers on this kind of commercial frontier could bind them to the governments and leaders of the colonies and to the empire as a whole. In the absence of those ties, the backcountry's centripetal and disorderly qualities would tend to make it indefensible and a drain on the resources of both Britain and Virginia.

Finally, the war did two more things for Washington. First, success in driving the French from Fort Duquesne enabled him to retire from the regiment with his reputation intact and, indeed, bestowed on him a deserved fame as the defender of Virginia's frontier. The freeholders of Frederick County, whose lives and properties he had done his best to defend for the previous three years, ratified his standing by electing him as their representative to the House of Burgesses. At the same time, the most eligible widow in New Kent County, Martha Custis, recognized his merits in another way by consenting to become his wife. This match, fortunate in so many ways, made him one of the larger landholders in northern Virginia and provided the material foundation to sustain his standing as a public-spirited gentleman.

Second, the war left the twenty-seven-year-old colonel with a lengthening personal history to ponder, framed by the knowledge that his life had been repeatedly spared when those of others were not. He had felt death brush his sleeve four times in five years: at Fort Necessity in 1754, when a third of his command became casualties; at the Battle of the Monongahela, when his hat and coat had been pierced by enemy bullets and two horses were killed under him; on the southwestern frontier of Virginia in 1756, when an Indian ambush had failed to trap him as he rode from fort to fort along a remote forest track; and in western Pennsylvania in November 1758, when the Second Virginia Regiment mistook the First Virginia Settlement

for the enemy at dusk, unleashing volleys that killed or wounded thirty of his men before he strode bellowing between the groups to make them cease firing. In none of these encounters did he suffer so much as a scratch.

Washington was not yet a regular churchgoer or an active Freemason, but he believed that God ordered events on earth.[64] Because he, like virtually every other theist of his day, understood human history in teleological terms, he could hardly escape the conclusion that his survival served some larger purpose. More than a decade passed before events showed him what the purpose might be.

Postwar Reforms—and Crises

If the Seven Years' War has lessons to teach us today, they may well center on the degree to which a decisive victory can be more perilous for the victor than the vanquished, for there are few historical episodes that give greater occasion for reflection on the dangers of hubris in the lives of states. France and Spain, humiliated by unprecedented military losses, adapted far better to the challenges of defeat than Britain dealt with the consequences of victory. The destruction of the French empire in North America laid the foundation for an unprecedented assertion of imperial authority when a series of British ministers pursued administrative and fiscal reforms that first baffled, then angered, the king's North American subjects. Little more than a decade after 1763, the same colonists who saw the Peace of Paris as the prelude to a golden age were struggling to understand why an empire they had served and celebrated and loved seemed suddenly to have no place in it for them—except, perhaps, as slaves. The irony is as obvious as it is instructive: the unintended consequence of the greatest military triumph of the eighteenth century was the self-immolation of the triumphant empire in a revolutionary civil war.

France survived its imperial debacle. His Most Christian Majesty ceded to Britain those possessions—Canada and the interior settlements from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico—that had always been the greatest drain on the royal purse, while Britain obligingly returned the most profitable colonies, the West Indian sugar islands, to French control. The economic consequences of peace thus stopped well short of catastrophe for France, which had entered the war at the peak of its eighteenth-century prosperity and bore the wartime loss of trade so well that the values of exports and