

Chapter 5

The French and Indian War

The English came to the New World and established farms and towns along the Atlantic coastline. They cleared away the trees and chased the Native Americans deeper into the woods. By 1750, British settlements were scattered along the seaboard from Maine to Georgia, and more adventurous colonists began looking for land further west by the Ohio River and into Western Pennsylvania.

The French landed along the St. Lawrence River in Canada. But unlike the English, many Frenchmen became trappers and traders. They befriended the Native Americans, traded with them and intermarried. By 1750 the French, too, were pushing down into the Ohio River and into western Pennsylvania.

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before the French and English settlers would fight over the same lands. France and England had been bitter rivals for generations. They competed for power in Europe, America, the Mediterranean, Asia, and Africa. Their religious convictions and methods of government differed widely. The French were Catholic and the British were Protestants. The French kept tight control over their colonies; the English allowed a great deal of self-government. The rivalries between the mother countries were felt along the frontiers in America and three wars, fought between England and France, had already spread to their American colonies. These wars are listed below:

EUROPE		NORTH AMERICA	
<u>Dates:</u>	<u>European Name</u>	<u>Dates:</u>	<u>American Name</u>
1688-97	War of the League of Augsburg	1689-97	King William's War
1701-13	War of the Spanish Succession	1702-13	Queen Anne's War
1740-48	War of the Austrian Succession	1744-48	King George's War
1756-63	Seven Years War	1754-63	French and Indian War

As you can see, the final conflict was known in North America as the French and Indian War. Unlike the previous three wars, the French and Indian War started in the colonies and spread to Europe. This chapter tells how this final colonial war in North America began and asks who started it, the American colonists or the English.

Instructions for George Washington

A close examination of the origins of the French and Indian War may start with a careful study of the activities of a very important American, George Washington. The man who commanded the American troops during the Revolution was closely connected with the events that triggered the French and Indian War. Like many Virginia planters, Washington had a passion for acquiring more land and was particularly interested in the fertile territory now located in the western sections of Pennsylvania but claimed by Virginia. He joined several wealthy and influential friends and acquaintances in forming the

Ohio Company with the expressed purpose of obtaining this land. In 1749 the Ohio Company secured a grant of 200,000 acres from the King of England because the King wanted the land settled and developed. This grant to Washington and his friends put England in direct conflict with France because the French King had claimed the same area along the Ohio and in western Pennsylvania. To enforce his claims, he instructed French agents to build forts along the Ohio River.

Robert Dinwiddie, one of George Washington's partners in the Ohio Company, was the acting governor of Virginia. Dinwiddie was encouraged by the British government to force the French out of the area. Washington, now 21 years old, and a colonel in the Virginia militia, volunteered for the mission. His orders from Dinwiddie were as follows:

As the French forces on the Ohio intend down as far as Logstown early in the Spring, I think it is for His Majesty's Service and the Protection of the Settlements on this Dom'n to do all in our Power to prevent their building any Forts or making any Settlem'ts on that river. I therefore, with advice of the Council, think proper to send immediately out 200 men to protect those already sent by the Ohio Company to build a Fort and to resist any attempts on them.⁸

George Washington's Journal

Like many men of his time, George Washington recorded important events of his life in a diary. The journal printed below fell into French hands during the ill-fated western expedition. Originally published in France to prove England's aggression, the diary was translated back into English and appears here, greatly abridged. The original was never recovered.

The selections excerpted below start with Washington's descriptions of his orders and end abruptly, shortly before his capture by the French. The most important event recorded in these memoirs is the capture of the French expedition, which sparked the war that would leave England in possession of Canada.



May 24th. At two o'clock, we arrived at the Meadows, where we saw a trader, who told us he had seen two Frenchmen the night before, and that he knew there was a strong detachment on the march...therefore I placed troops behind two natural entrenchments, and had our wagons put there also.

May 27th. About eight in the evening I received a message from Half-King who informed me, that as he was coming to join us, he had seen along the road, the tracks of two men, which he had followed, till he was brought thereby to a low, obscure place; that he was of the opinion the whole party of the French was hidden there. That very moment I sent out forty men...to attack them together. We had advanced pretty near to them, as we thought, when they discovered us; I ordered my company to fire...the greater part of the action lasted a quarter of an hour before the enemy were routed. We killed Mr. de Jumonville, the Commander of the party, as also nine others; we wounded

⁸Virginia Historical Society, *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, Richmond, 1883, pp. 48-49

*one and made twenty-one prisoners....The Indians scalped the dead and took away the greater part of their arms, after which we marched down with the prisoners under guard to the Indian camp....They informed me that they had been sent with a summons to order me to retire. A plausible pretense to discover our camp and to obtain knowledge of our forces and our situation. Instead of coming as an Ambassador, publicly and in an open manner, they came secretly and sought the most hidden retreats more suitable for deserters than for Ambassadors.**

May 30th. Detached Lieutenant West, and Mr. Spiltdorph, to take the prisoners to Winchester with a guard of twenty men. Began to erect a fort with small palisades, fearing that when the French should hear the news of that defeat we might be attacked by considerable forces.⁹

On the site of this palisade, Fort Necessity, Washington's forces were attacked on July 3, 1754. Fighting raged all day, with the French taking advantage of trees and the hills over-looking the defenders. Unable to make an adequate defense, the outnumbered Washington accepted liberal surrender terms. He began his long retreat back to Virginia on July 4th, his soldiers carrying the sick and wounded on their backs. Thoroughly defeated, left without wagons or ammunition, and surrounded by hostile Native Americans, this must have been the darkest hour of Washington's long career. He left the French in control of all land west of the Alleghenies and had failed miserably in his attempt to "repel" them.

Who Started the War: England or the Colonists?

The French and Indian War began with Washington's clash with the French in the Ohio territory. In order to regain the territory Washington lost, the British sent General Braddock all the way from England to capture Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh). But Braddock failed to heed warnings from his Indian allies that the French lay in wait for him, and was badly defeated, losing his life and several hundred of his soldiers. Emboldened by their success, Native Americans allied with the French attacked along the frontier, and hardly a settlement survived west of the Alleghenies. Fighting began in Europe two years later. England formed an alliance with Frederick the Great of Prussia to attack Austria. With the Prussians fighting her enemies in Europe, England was free to attack France's possessions in North America. The British captured both Quebec and Montreal (with hardly any help from the colonists) in 1759 and 1760; she was able to win convincing victories in the Caribbean (despite colonists illegal trade with the French) and in India.

When the fighting finally ended, England stood victorious and deeply in debt. The War, the English believed, had been fought in large measure to benefit her American colonies so they reasoned the colonists should help pay for the future cost of their own defense. The colonists disagreed, and this controversy led directly to the American Revolution.

* This fifteen-minute engagement was the Lexington Green of the French and Indian War. For his hand in this incident, Washington was condemned in France as violator of the law of nations; the dead Jumonville was hailed as a martyr and celebrated in heroic verse.

⁹ John C. Fitzpatrick ed., *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799*, Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1925.

Suggested Student Exercises:

1. Define or identify and briefly show the importance to the chapter of each of the following:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. 3 differences between French & British colonies | d. Robert Dinwiddie | h. Fort Necessity |
| b. 4 wars | e. Washington's orders | i. General Braddock |
| c. Ohio Company | f. Half-King | j. British victories |
| | g. "sent out 40 men" | k. colonial contributions |
| | | l. victory and debt |

Writing an Essay

Once proper preparation is made, the process of writing an essay is relatively easy. First, one must collect all relevant information; second, form a hypothesis; third, organize the information; and, fourth develop your ideas into paragraphs that include an introduction (with foreshadowing), a thesis, the supporting evidence for the thesis, and a conclusion.

2. Write a short paper, choosing one of the following thesis statements you to support:

- The French and Indian War was started by England and fought for her benefit.
- The French and Indian War was started by the colonists and fought for their benefit.
- The colonists were (or were not) morally obligated to help support England's war against the French.

Be sure to write an introductory paragraph for your essay that clearly states a thesis and major supporting generalizations and concludes with a paragraph that summarizes your arguments.