

North Carolina and the Opening of the French and Indian War

First in a series of articles intended to provide historical information about Fort Dobbs, its role in the French and Indian War, its significance in teaching the history of North Carolina's contribution to the eventual British Victory and as a window into a world wide conflict that shaped the future of the United States.

The French and Indian war began in 1754, largely over land near the Ohio River valley in what is now Western Pennsylvania, claimed by both the French and British. The British Government, knowing the situation with France could erupt into violence authorized the colonial governors in North America to, "draw forth the armed force of the Province, and...to repel Force by Force," But the governors were strictly instructed, "not to be the Agresor,"

Virginia had sent a party of men to construct a fort at the forks of the Ohio River to claim the land for Britain. After that party was forced away, and the land occupied by the French military, governor Dinwiddie of Virginia laid plans to, "repel force by force" and attack the French. To aid him he called on all the governors of the other British colonies. The only response he got was from North Carolina. Matthew Rowan, acting governor until the arrival of Arthur Dobbs from England, and namesake of Rowan County, was able to encourage the assembly to raise a 750 man regiment to aid Virginia. The colony's militia, as Rowan found, was in a shambles and unable to operate within the colony much less outside of it, so a full time military force had to be raised.

The North Carolina Regiment, now reduced to 450 men after the colony realized it couldn't pay for more, sailed and marched slowly to Virginia. The Command of the Regiment was given to North Carolinian James Innes. Innes had been an officer in a major British offensive in South America in 1741 and thus was one of only few with military experience in the colony. When he arrived in Virginia he was given command of the combined Anglo-American force consisting of troops from North Carolina, Virginia and a few British Regulars.

By the time his troops reached the rendezvous the Virginia troops under the 22 year old George Washington had already been defeated by the French. The rest of the summer saw the North Carolina and Virginia troops slowly fall apart until Innes disbanded his regiment in August. Innes remained at the rendezvous point and continued to use his utmost to fortify the post now known as Fort Cumberland, and prepare for another assault on the French that never came.

Attacks on the frontier of North Carolina by unknown Indians raised the fears of the colony and by the next year North Carolina voted not only to send troops back to the Ohio but to raise a company to protect the frontier of the colony itself. Appointed to command the company for the West was Hugh Waddell, who had arrived in North Carolina in 1753 and had been commissioned a Lieutenant in Innes' North Carolina Regiment in 1754. By the summer of 1755 he and the newly arrived governor Arthur Dobbs had sited the location for a fortification. When built it would come to be known as Fort Dobbs, and would be North Carolina's contribution to a series of fortifications and military installations that would effectively define the Western edge of British North America.

Due to the failure of British arms in 1754, the continent had been plunged into war, and despite of the lackluster performance of her troops North Carolina continued to raise provincial soldiers for the next 7 years to serve outside the colony and to defend her own borders. By 1763

when the war was over it had been fought for nearly a decade, had been waged across 5 continents, and ensured British domination of North America, North Carolina had been there from the beginning.

For more information on Fort Dobbs or North Carolina's role in the French and Indian War, please visit <http://www.fortdobbs.org>, call 704-873-5992 or visit the Fort Dobbs State Historic Site for an interpretative tour.