

Battle of Jumonville Glen 1754

This skirmish, for that is really what it was, on May 28, 1754, and the following one at Fort Necessity on June 28, 1754, served as the spark of the French and Indian War, 1754-1763. What led up to these skirmishes is a bit complicated, so I will try to keep it simple. There are many good articles available on the web.

In 1754, the British and French empires in North America were both competing for control of the Ohio country. This region, between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes and covering modern-day Ohio as well as parts of Pennsylvania and Indiana, was strategically important to both empires. The French had rejected the British claim, as put forth by Virginia's lieutenant governor, Robert Dinwiddie, that these lands were "so notoriously known to be the property of the Crown of Great Britain." To support this claim, Dinwiddie ordered a fort built at the Forks of the Ohio, where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers meet to form the Ohio River (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). While George Washington, an ambitious 21-year-old Lieutenant Colonel in the Virginia militia, was enroute with a force to help protect the construction of the fort, he learned that the French had taken it over and renamed it Fort Duquesne. This threatened the interests of the British, and their Native allies.

By May 24, his men had reached a place called the Great Meadows (near modern Farmington, Pennsylvania) a natural clearing containing fresh water and grass for the unit's animals. On the evening of May 27, a Native messenger arrived with information from Tanacharison, a Seneca representative of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy: a small French force consisting of Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville and 35 soldiers was camped in a glen nearby (near present-day Hopwood and Uniontown in Fayette County, Pennsylvania), only a few miles from the Great Meadows. They had been sent several days before by the commander of Fort Duquesne to see if Washington had entered French territory and with a summons to order him and his troops out. By the morning of May 28, the Virginians and Native American warriors had reached the French camp and surrounded it.

What happened next is not known for certain. An account from a French survivor claimed that the Virginians opened fire without warning or provocation. Washington's report claimed that one of the

Frenchmen saw the Virginians above the camp and fired a shot from his musket. Either way, Washington's men fired two volleys into the French camp. The French surrendered when they saw that Tanacharison and his warriors had cut off their only escape route. Washington reported one killed and three wounded, while the French had fourteen killed or wounded in the exchange. Among the wounded was the French commander, Ensign de Jumonville, who was later killed by Tanacharison, and nine of the dead French soldiers scalped by his men before a stunned Washington could intervene and stop them.

Following the battle, Washington returned to the Great Meadows and completed the construction of a fort, called Fort Necessity. On July 3, a combined retaliatory force of 600 French, French Canadian, and Indian soldiers, under the command of Jumonville's brother, Louis Coulon de Villiers, captured Fort Necessity and forced Washington to negotiate a withdrawal under arms. The capitulation document that Washington signed, written in French, which Washington did not know how to read, and that may have been poorly translated, included language claiming that Jumonville and his men had been assassinated. This was not how the British interpreted the situation. As could be expected, tensions escalated on both sides, and the French and Indian war was under way, not to cease until the Treaty of Paris February 10, 1763.

The town of Jumonville and the glen were later named in honor of the French officer killed there.