

Bloody Forks of the Ohio

A Live-Action Roleplaying Entertainment

by Nick Wedig

Adapted from the tabletop scenario

by Jason Morningstar

Elevator Pitch:

*I*n 1753, a young George Washington was sent into western Pennsylvania as a diplomatic envoy to the French army. His message from the British crown was claim of ownership over the region. If the French did not exit the area, the British would force them out.

The French disregarded the message, and forced the British army from its fort at the forks of the Ohio River. In its place, the French have built their own base, Fort Duquesne. Now it is a year later, and Washington has returned to settle the matter once and for all.

*T*his game was originally a tabletop scenario of the same name written by Jason Morningstar (<http://www.bulypulpitgames.com/fairplay/2009/07/08/the-bloody-forks-of-the-ohio/>). That game was in turn a hack of the excellent game *Lady Blackbird* by John Harper (<http://www.onese-vendesign.com/ladyblackbird/>), which was itself assembled from bits of a variety of quality roleplaying games. Check those out for further free entertainment.

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GM's Background:

The two great empires of the 18th century are about to collide in a muddy field in western Pennsylvania. The British colonies on the eastern seaboard are thriving, and Britain wishes to expand westward. France controls both New France (i.e. Canada) and the Mississippi River via New Orleans. Naturally, France wishes to find a connection between its two colonies, which leads its forces directly into conflict with Britain's expansion across the continent.

In 1753, a young **George Washington** was sent into western Pennsylvania as a diplomatic envoy to the French army. His message from the British crown was claim of ownership over the region. If the French did not exit the area, the British would force them out. While in the region, Washington noted that a fort could be built in the very defensible spot where two smaller rivers joined to make the Ohio River. Following his advice, **Fort Prince George** was built where the rivers met, making it guarded on three sides by water. The French disregarded the diplomatic entreaties, and forced the British army from Fort Prince George. In its place, the French have built their own base, **Fort Duquesne**. Now it is a year later, and Washington has returned to settle the matter once and for all.

After his journey, Washington published his diary of the journey and became very famous back east. He has been sent back to take command from **William Trent** after Trent surrendered the fort to the French. Following the surrender, Trent and the British forces retreated southwards and hastily built a ramshackle pile of logs dubbed "**Fort Necessity**". Fort Necessity is barely a fort at all, and exists mainly to keep the hungry troops from stealing food from the supplies. The British army is outnumbered, hungry, demoralized and, in Washington's own words, "loose and idle". It is his job to fix the situation and get the French to exit the region, hopefully without igniting a war.

Complicating the conflict between the two European powers are the internal politics of the local native American tribes. The **Iroquois Confederation** is a collection of several other tribes banded together, notably the **Seneca** tribe. The Iroquois confederation claims to own this region through right of conquest: they fought and defeated the **Delaware** in the recent past. The Delaware nation (who call themselves the Lenape) make up most of the population of the area, and were badly oppressed and mistreated by the Iroquois. The Delaware have recently rebelled and severed all ties to the Iroquois. Washington's ally **Half-King Tanaghrisson** is here to attempt to bring the Delaware back into the fold, but the Delaware have no interest in rejoining the Confederation. The British are allied with the Iroquois. Washington is in fact an adopted member of the tribe, called **Conotocariou**, "The Destroyer of Villages". This alliance has made the Delaware distrustful of the British in the region, though the Delaware also distrust the French.

Ignatius Jones, a British soldier, deserted his post to marry a Delaware woman called **Raspberry Girl**. Ignatius Jones has since been recaptured by the British and is being held awaiting court martial. But the British need all the men they can get to fight the French, and they could use a bargaining chip in interacting with the Delaware.

There are about 300 British soldiers at Fort Necessity, but at least 600 French soldiers at Fort Duquesne. Both colonial armies are outnumbered by the natives in the region: the Iroquois and Delaware could each muster at least 700 warriors if war were to come.

Louis Coulon de Villiers commands Fort Duquesne. He has received orders from Quebec to not start any violence in the Ohio River area. If the British start a conflict, the French soldiers can fight back, but they cannot begin the fighting themselves. Consequently, de Villiers has constructed a plot to provoke the British into starting the war. De Villiers' brother **Joseph de Jumonville** will be sent as diplomatic envoy to Fort Necessity, though his mission will be to provoke Washington's anger instead of peaceably negotiation. The majority of the French army sits a mile away from Fort Necessity, at Deer Lake, waiting for a signal or for sounds of gunfire. De Villiers does not know that his wife, **Marie-Amable de Villiers**, has decided to accompany Jumonville to Fort Necessity to see her lover, George Washington.

*H*istorical accuracy is not essential here. I am not a historian, and great liberties have been taken with some of the characters and events. While writing the larp, I kept a list of historical inaccuracies, but it became too long and cumbersome to track. This larp isn't intended as historical reenactment; it's more like an adventure story inspired by real historical events. The situation could veer off from historical truth pretty easily, and it is best for players and GMs to explore and see how differently things might have turned out. If you're interested in what really happened, there's a note at the end of these instructions, and a wealth of actual history books you could read.

Rules:

There are a few basic rules used in this game. Each character is broken down into a Background section, a Motive, a Key, a special Ability and notes covering what they know about the other characters. The Background and Dramatis Personae sections are straightforward; they simply tell the player information about themselves and others. Motive is a goal or some task the character wishes to succeed at in the course of the larp. An Ability is a special power that affects how conflicts work. They'll be covered under Conflicts, below.

Keys are a mechanic for rewarding roleplaying. They're taken from the tabletop rpg *The Shadow of Yesterday*. Each time that the player performs the action described on the Key, they get an extra card (cards are used in conflicts, see below). You should distribute decks of playing cards around the playing area, so that players can hand out cards as they see someone hit their Key. As a GM, you should have a deck of cards on hand to hand out cards as a result of hitting a Key.

Conflicts:

*I*n a game like this, you will occasionally get situations where two players want different things. In cases like this, you have a conflict.

Each player should start with a hand of three cards. As they hit their Keys, they can receive more cards.

In a conflict, one player plays a card from their hand. Then the other player in the conflict has three options:

- 1) Follow Suit by playing a card of the same suit as the first card played, but of higher value. (Thereon, the other player must follow suit, trump or forfeit.)
- 2) Play Trump by activating their Ability. To do this, they need to explain how their ability aids them in some way. Then they play any card from their hand; the suit of that card becomes the Trump suit for the conflict. The opponent must either play a higher card of the same suit or forfeit the conflict. Further plays for this conflict must be of that same suit.
- 3) Forfeit and fail at their task.

Each card played must be of the leading suit or (once trump is played) of the trump suit, and each card played must be of higher value than previous cards. (Aces are High.)

Whichever player plays the last card in the conflict wins and gets what they want out of the conflict. The other player has failed at their task and does not succeed at whatever they were trying to achieve in the conflict.

Language:

Language is a supremely important issue in the game, as it was in the historical events portrayed. Some characters only speak one language, some speak two or three languages. The important decision making characters do not share languages with other important decision making characters, so they have to rely on translators. These translators in turn may have their own motives and may twist the messages in unexpected ways.

It is unlikely that you can cast the game such that there are actually three languages properly distributed among players to take the place of English, French and Shawnee in the game. In order to allow language to function properly in the game, I suggest that you use a series of hand signals. If you are speaking in English, hold up your hand and extend your pinky finger, as if you were daintily drinking tea. If you are speaking Shawnee, hold you hand vertically, flat with the palm facing out, just like stereotypical Indians in old Hollywood movies. If you are speaking French, make a peace sign with your hand (since the French are nominally here on a peaceful diplomatic mission).

Now, you will overhear many conversations in languages your character does not understand. You may even hear about people lying or betraying you. Try to keep your personal knowledge and character knowledge separate. Think of this as a way of enjoying dramatic and comedic irony when you know more than your PC does.

PCs in order of importance: (And impressionistic casting advice)

<i>Washington</i>	Is young and untested at this point. He's a natural leader who has never had to do much leading
<i>Jumonville</i>	Should be able to play slimy and annoying and must be okay with his character dying
<i>Marie-Amable</i>	You want the most melodramatic player here, because she's primarily involved in interpersonal plotlines.
<i>Shingas</i>	Should be very intimidating, even if he's a real pushover
<i>Half-King</i>	You want someone who will resort to violent solutions before trying nonviolent ones.
<i>French Margaret</i>	French Margaret is a bit more active than Marie, so cast accordingly
<i>Trent</i>	Should seem trustworthy, but actually be scheming behind the scenes

(That's pretty much the minimum needed to play. Use those PCs first, and then optionally use the characters below.)

<i>Raspberry Girl</i>	You probably want someone who will enjoy deliberately misinterpreting things
<i>Jacob Van Braam</i>	You need an instigator here, who will cause trouble with Trent.
<i>Torrence Swiney</i>	Has relatively little going on as a character. So you either need a player who is happy to stay on the sidelines or a player who will instigate things themselves.

NPCs:

*I*gnatius Jones is the only major NPC likely to need roleplayed. He's a nice guy, who truly loves his wife and just wants to escape all this warfare and conflict and live peaceably in the woods.

If you need to complicate the climax, then you could have Daniel Hyacinthe de Beaujeu (a French commando who wears native garb when in combat) enter and try to save Jumonville or Marie-Amable. Beaujeu also would work as a backup character if one or more PCs die early on in the game, though no sheet is provided. ("Key: Love of Native Culture, Motive: Protect Jumonville and Marie-Amable, and Ability: Commando Warrior" would work pretty well as a basic sketch.)

Final Historical Note:

*I*n real world history, George Washington and Half King Tanaghrisson found Jumonville while scouting and captured him in the Battle of Jumonville Glen. Once they had him captive, they tried to question him, but neither spoke French. After some time failing to communicate with Jumonville, Half-King became frustrated and killed him with a tomahawk. When Captain de Villiers heard of his brother's death, he attacked Fort Necessity.

Surrounded and outgunned, the British couldn't hold the French off for long. The Battle of Fort Necessity was the only battle where Washington ever surrendered. In the surrender, Washington signed a treaty (written in French which he could not read) that claimed that Washington had "murdered" Jumonville. The French used this as propaganda throughout the French and Indian War, though Washington claimed to not have known what he was signing.

The surrender of Fort Prince George wasn't really Trent's fault. He was really out hunting when it all happened, and his second in command handed the fort to the French. Trent did, however, go on to invent the smallpox laden blanket.