

**LORD DUNMORE'S ETHIOPIAN REGIMENT**

by

**CHARLES W. CAREY, JR.**

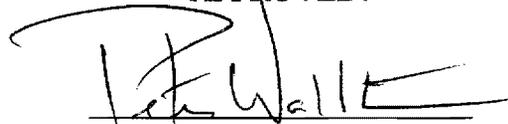
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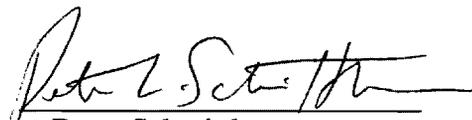
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# LORD DUNMORE'S ETHIOPIAN REGIMENT

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(ABSTRACT)

Most observers consider that Lord Dunmore was the driving force behind the creation of the Ethiopian Regiment. This paper demonstrates that the slaves themselves provided the necessary impetus for bringing about Dunmore's Proclamation of Emancipation, and that the governor simply responded to slaves' willingness to take up arms in pursuit of liberty. This paper also considers the role played by non-slave actors in the exploits of the Regiment. These actors included the British Parliament; various British military and government officials; the Virginia Convention of 1775; the various Virginia military units, both regular and volunteer; and the white population of Virginia as a whole. However, primary emphasis is placed upon the efforts and actions of the Ethiopians themselves.

The first chapter investigates the events which led up to Dunmore's Declaration of Emancipation, and clarifies the degree to which the servile uprisings in the preceding century influenced Dunmore's decision to free and arm Virginia's slaves. The second chapter details the Ethiopians' involvement in the military actions associated with the Battle of Great Bridge on December 9, 1775. The third chapter

describes the Regiment's other engagements, including its defense of the Portsmouth enclave and the British sanctuary on Gwynn's Island, and the skirmishes at St. George's Island, Maryland, and Aquia Creek, Virginia. The fourth chapter evaluates the importance of the Ethiopian Regiment both as an instrument of Dunmore's policy and as a means for slaves to gain their freedom. An appendix includes the names of over two hundred confirmed or suspected Ethiopians.

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## INTRODUCTION

Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment was a ragtag bunch of runaway slaves which did little to distinguish itself during its existence from November 1775 to August 1776. Consequently, the unit has received scant attention from historians, and those few who deign to mention the regiment usually do so with disdain. From a military point of view, this dismissal is entirely justified. The Ethiopians were poorly trained, poorly led, and largely ineffective in combatting Virginia's patriots in the early days of the American Revolution. Yet their exploits are significant nonetheless, not for their shortcomings as soldiers but for their achievements as seekers after freedom. In other words, the importance of the Ethiopians lies not in what they failed to do for Dunmore, but in what they set out to do for themselves.

The term "Ethiopian" is a misnomer; none of the runaways who joined Dunmore were from Ethiopia, although some may have been born in other parts of Africa. The term is derived from two Greek words meaning "burnt face," and was used by the ancients to denote all peoples of swarthy complexion living primarily in Africa south of Egypt but also in other parts of the world. In the eighteenth century, "Ethiopian" was often used to refer to blacks in general, serving as a flowery synonym for "African" or "Negro."<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Quarles' article "Lord Dunmore as Liberator" remains the definitive published study<sup>2</sup> on the subject and

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<sup>1</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 5:422-23.

<sup>2</sup>Benjamin Quarles, "Lord Dunmore as Liberator," William and Mary Quarterly (October 1958), 494-507. This article appeared almost verbatim as Chapter Two in Quarles' book The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

has informed the work of Sylvia Frey, Adele Hast, Ivor Noel-Hume, James Walker, and Ellen Gibson Wilson. All of them regard the Ethiopians as a military unit only. Certainly this aspect must be considered, and I offer herein the most exhaustive description of the Ethiopians' military exploits to date. However, my principal contribution to the historiography is to regard the Ethiopian Regiment as a sort of slave revolt. Dunmore's proclamation might never have been issued had not Virginia's slaves demonstrated over the previous century a willingness to rise up against their masters in pursuit of freedom, and the notion that the Ethiopians might have had an agenda of their own has received insufficient attention.

This paper differs from the work that precedes it in other important ways. Unlike my predecessors, I do not believe that Dunmore ever intended to rely to any degree on the military prowess of his black recruits. It seems clear to me that he threatened to arm the slaves solely as a means to discourage the patriots from attacking him, and that, once raised, the Ethiopians were intended to be employed primarily as a military labor force. I also believe that the number of runaway slaves who joined the Ethiopians was half again the number which my predecessors have supposed, and that approximately twenty-five per cent of the adult slaves in the two counties closest to Dunmore's base in Norfolk succeeded in joining the governor.

This paper contains the names of over two hundred blacks whose involvement with the Ethiopian Regiment is either confirmed or strongly suspected. In an effort to keep the narrative moving, I present most of these names in several tables in the Appendix. The Appendix also contains two maps that should help the reader to visualize the action and a tabular enumeration of the Ethiopians.

CHAPTER ONE:  
"THESE BLACK RASCALS"

In November 1775, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore and royal governor of Virginia, proclaimed freedom for every slave who would desert his rebel master, wend his way to the governor, and take up arms in the name of His Majesty the King. Those who accepted the offer became Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. By confronting whites with their worst nightmare, Dunmore used slaves as pawns in the contest to recruit loyalists and patriots in Virginia prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Slaves could play this passive role because, for over a century, they had actively demonstrated their willingness to do battle in pursuit of liberty.

Almost immediately upon their introduction into the colony in 1619, blacks ran for their freedom. By 1672, the gangs formed by these runaways terrified white Virginians to the point that the House of Burgesses ordered that these fugitive bondsmen be hunted down and killed. Four years later, in a twist of irony, the rebel Nathaniel Bacon attempted to increase their number. In 1676, Governor William Berkeley proclaimed freedom for all indentured servants whose masters signed an oath of allegiance to the rebels. Bacon responded by extending the same offer to the slaves and servants of those who remained loyal to Berkeley, and was joined by an undetermined number of slaves.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large of Virginia (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants Jr., 1809-23), 2:299; Charles M. Andrews, ed., Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675-1690 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1952), 65, 94. Whites' fear of black servile uprising throughout the South is discussed in W. Robert Higgins, "The Ambivalence of Freedom: Whites, Blacks, and the Coming of the American Revolution in the South," in W. Robert Higgins, ed., The Revolutionary War in the South;

As white Virginians relied less on indentured servants and more on unwilling Africans to provide strong backs for their tobacco fields, their dread of slave revolt increased. Between 1680 and 1690, the Burgesses passed three acts for "preventing Negro insurrections," and for good reason. In 1687, an insurrection on the Northern Neck was discovered and defused at the last moment. In 1709, another slave revolt, this time in the counties of Surry, Isle of Wight, and James City, was prevented in the eleventh hour. A revolt involving hundreds of slaves very nearly occurred in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties in 1730. Rumors circulated throughout the slave quarters that King George II had granted freedom to all baptized slaves in the colony, but that their masters refused to allow it. Angered beyond restraint, about two hundred slaves gathered on a September Sunday while their masters were at church and selected leaders for an impending insurrection. The plot was discovered before it could be implemented, and the four leaders were executed. Thoroughly shaken by what might have occurred, the Virginia Council advised whites to take their weapons with them to church to avoid any similar surprises in the future.<sup>2</sup>

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Power, Conflict, and Leadership (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), as well as in Sidney Kaplan, "The 'Domestic Insurrections' of the Declaration of Independence," Journal of Negro History 61 (July 1976), 243-55. Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1975), pooh-poohs the danger of slave revolt since no whites ever died in one (p. 309), but this knowledge after the fact certainly did not diminish the fear felt by whites.

<sup>2</sup>H.R. McIlwaine, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1925-28), 1:86, 317, 510; 2:35; 3:234-35; Governor William Gooch to Bishop of London, May 28, 1731, Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (VMHB) (1924), 32:322-23; Virginia Council Journal, October 28, 1730, VMHB (1928), 36:345-46.

The scope of the 1730 near-insurrection made at least one Virginian realize how vulnerable the colony was to such a catastrophe. In a moment of prescience, William Byrd of Westover foresaw the future involvement of Lord Dunmore with the slaves. "In case there should arise a man of desperate courage amongst us, exasperated by a desperate fortune," he wrote in 1736, "he might with more advantage than Cataline kindle a servile war ... and tinge our rivers as wide as they are with blood."<sup>3</sup>

As relations between Britain and France deteriorated towards war in North America, Virginians concerned themselves with what use the French might make of the colony's slaves. As "Peter Limits" pointed out in 1752, "slaves are very capable, in case of war with a foreign enemy, of being excited to revolt against their masters." General Edward Braddock's drubbing at the hands of the French and Indians three years later sent further ripples of fear through the colony's white population. Observing that "the Negro slaves ... have been very audacious [following] the defeat," Governor Robert Dinwiddie dispatched a detachment of militiamen to "each county to protect it from [their] combinations." When the situation worsened, he declared that "we dare not venture to part with any of our white men any distance, as we must have a watchful eye over our Negro slaves."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>William Byrd to Earl of Egmont, July 12, 1736, Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1935), 4:131-32. For a more complete description of slave uprisings in Virginia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

<sup>4</sup>"The Speech of Peter Limits," Virginia Gazette, April 10, 1752; Dinwiddie to Earl of Halifax, July 24, 1755, Collections of the Virginia Historical Society, New Series, Vol. 4, The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, edited by R.A. Brock (Richmond: The Society, 1884), 114; Dinwiddie to Henry Fox, May 24, 1756, Ibid., 414-15.

The successful conclusion of the French and Indian War did little to lessen white fears of slave insurrection. Any gathering of blacks was seen by whites as an insurrection in the making, and such gatherings were closely monitored. One slave turned New Light evangelist, George Noble's Jupiter from Prince George County, was severely whipped on the steps of Sussex County Courthouse in September 1767 for "stirring up the Negroes to an insurrection." On rare occasion, a real uprising broke out to justify the vigilance. Sometime around Christmas 1769, such a revolt was barely contained on the plantation of Bowler Cocke in Hanover County. Forty or fifty slaves wielding clubs and barrel staves fought fourteen whites armed with guns. After a savage battle, the ring-leader and one or two other slaves were killed, five others were wounded, and the rest fled.<sup>5</sup>

As natural increase and importation combined to swell the colony's slave population, white Virginians became increasingly apprehensive of being washed away in the spilled blood of a slave revolt. Their sense of dread was fueled in part by the Virginia Gazette(s). The colony's newspapers dutifully reported what was known about slave revolts in other lands, especially the Caribbean islands. Virginians read about slave uprisings, real and imagined, in Surinam and South Carolina in 1766, in Grenada in 1767, and in Curacao and Jamaica in 1769. That same year, motivated partly by fear, the Burgesses passed an act establishing a five per cent duty on imported slaves. Similar acts had been approved since 1699 in order to fund the colonial government, but this time the Burgesses seemed intent on curtailing the number of blacks entering Virginia. Because of the influence of slave trading interests in Britain, the act was disallowed and

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<sup>5</sup>Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), October 1, 1767;  
Virginia Gazette (Rind), January 25, 1770.

instructions issued to the governor forbidding him to approve any future acts remotely calculated to interfere with what the Burgesses called "so very pernicious a commerce." On April 1, 1772, the assembly forwarded an address to His Majesty humbly petitioning him to repeal these instructions so that "the most destructive influence" of the proliferation of imported slaves might be avoided.<sup>6</sup>

Enter Dunmore. Having been appointed royal governor of the colony the year before, his lordship sent a copy of the petition to Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and with it his own thoughts on the matter. Blacks seethed with resentment at their lot, he wrote, and were "ready to join the first [enemy] that would encourage them to revenge themselves," after which "a conquest of this country would inevitably be effected in a very short time." However, Dunmore was thinking not of fighting the colonists but rather one of Britain's external foes, most likely Spain, with whom Britain had almost gone to war the year before and whose agents were intriguing with the Cherokees and Creeks. He was concerned that slaves might be recruited to fight for a foreign power against His Majesty's loyal subjects in Virginia,

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<sup>6</sup>Dunmore to Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State for the Colonies, May 1, 1772, K. G. Davies, ed., Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783 (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1975), 5:94; Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), March 7 and March 28, 1766; March 19, March 26, and April 16, 1767; and April 6, 1769; Virginia Gazette (Rind), August 24, 1769; Donnan, 4:66-150 passim.; Davies, 1:112-228 passim.; Address of House of Burgesses of Virginia to the King, April 1, 1772, Ibid., 5:56-57. Dunmore pegged the slave population at 67 percent of the colony's total, but he made his estimate after only one year in Virginia, all of it spent east of Richmond. In 1770, Virginia probably held about two hundred thousand blacks.

and so he urged Hillsborough "to find proper means of averting a calamity so alarming."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Dunmore did not consider using slaves as soldiers against Virginians until three years later. Perturbed by the number of independent companies drilling throughout the colony by the end of 1774, Dunmore was further disheartened on March 23, 1775, when the Virginia Convention created a militia. At the time, His Majesty's forces in Virginia consisted of a handful of Royal Navy vessels and the few dozen marines on board, hardly sufficient to deter the soon-to-be-raised legions of the patriots. His lordship feared that, if the militia took possession of the colony's gunpowder stored in the public magazine in Williamsburg, he would be hard pressed to defend his tenuous position. Accordingly, on April 21, Dunmore took steps to prevent the gunpowder from falling into patriot hands. Under the pretense of securing the munitions at Williamsburg from a slave uprising rumored to be taking place across the James River in Surry County, a small band of marines transported the powder in the wee hours of the night to the safety of a British warship.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Dunmore to Hillsborough, May 1, 1772, Ibid., 5:94-95; Hillsborough to General Thomas Gage, January 2, 1771, Ibid., 1:245. Ivor Noel-Hume, 1775--Another Part of the Field (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), posits that Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina and Dunmore discussed using slaves as soldiers during the first week of January 1775 while Martin was visiting Dunmore, and offers this letter as evidence that Dunmore had long considered raising the slaves (p. 37). However, Noel-Hume fails to consider the implications of the letter's last line, and no other evidence confirms what the two governors discussed.

<sup>8</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 24, 1774, Ibid., 8:266; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775, Peter Force, ed., American Archives (Washington, DC: Clarke and Force, 1837-53), 4th ser., 2:168; Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 1, 1775, Davies, 9:107-8; Peyton Randolph to Mann Page Jr., Lewis Willis, and Benjamin Grymes Jr., April 27, 1775, Robert

The "Gunpowder Incident" infuriated the colonists. The more bellicose of them threatened to inflict bodily harm on Captain Foy and Lieutenant Collins, commanders of the midnight expedition. Upon hearing these threats, Dunmore flew into a rage and "swore by the living God" that any injury or insult to either of these two gentlemen or to himself would be punished severely. "He would declare freedom to the slaves, and reduce the city of Williamsburg to ashes," attested Dr. William Pasteur, mayor of Williamsburg, who was in the governor's palace at the time of Dunmore's tirade. Pasteur had no doubt that his lordship counted "all the slaves on the side of Government." In a calmer moment, the governor reiterated his intentions to John Randolph, the colony's attorney general: "In case armed people came to Williamsburg, he would fix up the royal standard to distinguish the friends of Government from its foes; and that if Negroes, on that occasion, offered their services, they would be received."<sup>9</sup>

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L. Scribner and Brent Tarter, eds., Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973-83), 3:64. By seizing the powder, Dunmore acted in unconscious imitation of Governor Thomas Gage of Massachusetts, who had received orders from Lord Dartmouth, Hillsborough's successor, to seize "military stores of every kind that may be ... in any public magazine ... for the purpose of aiding rebellions." On April 19, two days before Dunmore acted, Gage sent British regulars to Lexington and Concord on a similar mission (Dartmouth to Gage, April 15, 1775, Clarence E. Carter, ed., The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage (London: Archon Books, 1969), 2:191).

<sup>9</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, June 14, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 2:1209-11. Benjamin Quarles, "Lord Dunmore as Liberator," William and Mary Quarterly 15 (October 1958), 494-507, suggests that Dunmore had planned to raise the slaves eight months prior to the proclamation, that is, in March (p. 496). However, no evidence suggests that Dunmore had any thought of raising the slaves before the end of April. Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," Journal of Southern

It was all a bluff. His vehemence to the contrary, Dunmore had no intention of raising the slaves. When a group of slaves offered their services to the governor in early May, as Patrick Henry and the Hanover County volunteers marched on the capital to demand the return of the powder, the governor "threatened them with his severest resentment, should they presume to renew their application." He made it abundantly clear to Lord Dartmouth, Hillsborough's successor, that, although slaves would make a useful addition to a provincial corps, his threat to free and arm them was nothing more than a bluff. He also made sure that the magistrates of Williamsburg and the leading citizens of the colony learned of the threat, an action more in keeping with a bluff than a battle plan.<sup>10</sup>

Dunmore played on the colonists' worst fears because he hoped to cow the patriots into meek submission. Like James Madison, the governor knew "that is the only part in which this colony is vulnerable, and if we should be subdued, we shall fall like Achilles by the hand of one that knows that secret." He also feared that he and his family would be kidnapped and held hostage "to answer for any consequences that may ensue from the contest with Great Britain." He despaired of receiving assistance from Virginians still loyal to the Crown without "some appearance of force to protect the first who venture to me," and he lacked the force with which to do just that. So he bluffed. The governor told Dartmouth, "upon the grounds of self-preservation, if on no

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History 49 (August 1983), 375-98, mistakenly dates Dunmore's letter to Dartmouth of May 1 as March 1, thereby causing the misconception on her part that Dunmore had "secret plans" (p. 377) to raise the slaves before the Gunpowder Incident.

<sup>10</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, June 14, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 2:1210-11; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), May 4, 1775; Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 1, 1775, Davies, 9:109-10.

other, I had full right to make use of any means I could avail myself of for my defense against a furious people."<sup>11</sup>

Word of Dunmore's threat spread quickly. By the end of May it was a topic of discussion from Boston to Savannah. General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of His Majesty's troops in North America and governor of Massachusetts, wrote Dartmouth on May 15 that Dunmore's declaration "has startled the insurgents." Sir James Wright, governor of Georgia, notified Dartmouth on May 25 that the reports from Virginia "have thrown the people in Carolina and in this province into a ferment." Some Georgians believed as many as 20,000 slaves from Georgia and South Carolina would fight for the British should they be offered weapons and liberty. Indeed, "slave insurrection" was a concept so fraught with terror for white Georgians that they could not bear to say the words, as demonstrated in an address of their Provincial Congress to the King: "It is believed methods have been more than thought of too shocking for human nature to be even named in the list of grievances suffered under a British king." In Maryland, reports circulated that, as a result of Dunmore's threat, officers and sailors of the Royal Navy had been "tampering with our Negroes, and have nightly meetings with them; and all for the glorious purpose of enticing them to cut their masters' throats while they are asleep." Concerned planters in Maryland petitioned Governor Robert Eden for arms and

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<sup>11</sup>James Madison to William Bradford, June 19, 1775, William T. Hutchinson and William M.E. Rachal, eds., The Papers of James Madison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 1:153; Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 15, 1775, Davies, 9:135-36; Dunmore to Gage, May 1, 1775, Ibid., 9:110-11; Dunmore to Dartmouth, June 25, 1775, Ibid., 9:204-5. Donald Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), concludes that Dunmore's actions were the result of "frenzy and fear rather than part of a complete scheme for using slaves against their masters" (p. 110).

ammunition with which to prevent the specter of slave insurrection from spreading from their sister colony.<sup>12</sup>

Dunmore's declaration had a startling effect on events in South Carolina. Although no evidence suggests that either Governor William Campbell or any other colonial official had any thoughts of raising and arming the slaves, the patriot South Carolina Association made shrewd use of the issue and cleverly turned it to their advantage. Citing "the dread of instigated insurrections in the colonies" as just cause to "drive an oppressed people to the use of arms," the patriots in South Carolina began playing on the fears of "the ignorant and unwary" in order to gain their support. Rumors of slave revolts circulated daily, and the newly-arrived Campbell was reputed to have brought 14,000 stand of arms from England to be placed in the hands of bloodthirsty slaves. Not surprisingly, South Carolinians subscribed to the Association in droves.<sup>13</sup>

When none of the rumored slave insurrections took place, the patriots found it advantageous to produce one. Many slaves heard the patriot propaganda and wondered aloud in small groups if the British really intended to fight the Americans over the issue of black liberty. One such group was overheard, seized, and imprisoned. Upon being

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<sup>12</sup>Gage to Dartmouth, May 15, 1775, Carter, 1:399; Wright to Dartmouth, May 25, 1775, Davies, 9:144; John Adams diary entry, September 24, 1775, Charles F. Adams, ed., The Works of John Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1850-56), 2:428; Address of Provincial Congress of Georgia to the King, July 14, 1775, Davies, 11:46; Extract of a Letter from a Clergyman ("T.T.") in Maryland to His Friend in England, August 2, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:10; Robert Eden to William Eden, April 28, 1775, Ibid., 7:349.

<sup>13</sup>Narrative of George Millegen, September 15, 1775, Ibid., 11:109-10; John Stuart to Dartmouth, July 21, 1775, Ibid., 11:53; Campbell to Dartmouth, August 31, 1775, Ibid., 11:94.

interrogated, several members of the group pointed the accusing finger at Thomas "Jerry" Jeremiah, a free black who owned a significant amount of property, including slaves. Jeremiah had once piloted a British man-of-war, and his real "crime" was saying that he would not mind piloting one again. The evidence against Jeremiah was so flimsy that he had to be tried twice before a conviction could be obtained. On August 18, despite the best efforts of Campbell to free him and the recantation of the chief witness against him, Jeremiah was hanged and his lifeless corpse charred to a crisp. His fate was best expressed by George Millegen, a Royal Army surgeon: "Thus this poor fellow fell a sacrifice to the groundless fears of some and the wicked policy of others."<sup>14</sup>

When the Virginia Convention investigated the causes and effects of the Gunpowder Incident, its delegates quickly realized that the colony's state of unrest centered around Dunmore's threat. "An alarm concerning the slaves ... was greatly increased by the report of the governor's intentions to declare them free," testified Hugh Hamilton of Westmoreland County. Richard Bland reported that many residents of Augusta County "apprehended every evil from [Dunmore's] threat ... to enfranchise the slaves, on condition they would rebel against their masters." Thomas Mitchell of Louisa County told the Convention that "the governor's declaration to give freedom to the slaves greatly inflamed the minds of

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<sup>14</sup>John Drayton, Memoirs of the American Revolution (Charleston, SC: A.E. Miller, 1821), 1:231; Campbell to Dartmouth, August 31, 1775, Davies, 11:95-97; Narrative of George Millegen, September 15, 1775, Ibid., 11:110-11. A good discussion of the events surrounding Jeremiah can be found in Peter H. Wood, "'Taking Care of Business' in Revolutionary South Carolina: Republicanism and the Slave Society," in The Southern Experience in the American Revolution, Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 268-93.

those who believed it." Similar testimony came from representatives of King George, Spotsylvania, and Caroline counties. Four members of Hanover County's independent company swore that the governor's threat of emancipation was as much the reason for their march on Williamsburg as his seizing of the colony's gunpowder. James Lyle and Robert Donald of Chesterfield County assured the Convention that the governor's declaration had led to "uncommon diligence ... in training the independent company and the militia to arms." The Convention concluded that "the colony was in a perfect state of tranquility till ... your lordship's removal of the gunpowder ... and ... your irritating and most unjustifiable threats."<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin Waller told Dunmore it was his declaration to raise the slaves, not the seizing of the powder, that "lost the confidence of the people." By early summer, Dunmore realized how horribly his bluff had backfired. Sweltering on board the Fowey after fleeing the capital on June 8, the governor informed Dartmouth that "my declaration that I would arm and set free such slaves as should assist me if I was attacked has stirred fears in them which cannot easily subside."<sup>16</sup>

Dunmore was not the only colonial governor who considered using slaves in a military role. Gage saw early on that British troops would have to be augmented by provincial forces. In October 1774, he advised Lord Barrington, Secretary of War, that any army put into the field against the rebels should include "a large body of good irregulars." No

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<sup>15</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, June 14, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 2:1208-15 passim.; Address of Burgesses to Dunmore, June 19, 1775, Davies, 9:184.

<sup>16</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, June 14, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 2:1210; Dunmore to Dartmouth, June 25, 1775, Davies, 9:204.

evidence confirms that the general was thinking of recruiting blacks for such a force, but he may have been. During that same year, Gage was approached by a delegation of blacks who offered their services as soldiers if he would provide them with weapons and, more importantly, set them free after the war was concluded. Certainly the thought had occurred to some of his junior officers. On October 28, 1768, a Royal Army captain and two other officers told a group of black servants whom they accosted in Boston "that the soldiers were come to procure their freedoms, and that with their help and assistance they should be able to drive all the Liberty Boys to the devil." Regardless, by June 1775 Gage was ready to accept such a proposal, for he wrote Barrington that "things are now come to that crisis, that we must avail ourselves of every resource, even to raise the Negroes, in our cause."<sup>17</sup>

To the South, Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina flirted with the notion of enlisting slaves as soldiers on the side of Government. Dunmore's threat to free and arm the slaves had a powerful effect on the residents of that colony, and some of them feared that Martin might be thinking along the same lines as Dunmore. The Committees of Safety for Wilmington and New Hanover County began patrolling their jurisdictions for rebellious slaves on June 21, and within a few days found what they were looking for. A "great number" of blacks brandishing weapons was discovered lurking about in the woods. Before they could be disarmed, one of the slaves was killed. Many patriots saw the hand of their despised governor at work and publicly accused Martin of fomenting

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<sup>17</sup>Gage to Barrington, October 3, 1774, Carter, 2:656; Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 22, 1774, Charles F. Adams, ed., Letters of Mrs. Adams, the Wife of John Adams (Boston: Wilkins, Carter and Co., 1848), 20; Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), December 1, 1768; Gage to Barrington, June 12, 1775, Carter, 2:684.

rebellion amongst the slaves. The governor's attempts to refute the accusations served only to convince Carolinians that they were essentially true: "Nothing could ever justify the design, falsely imputed to me, of giving encouragement to the Negroes, but the actual and declared rebellion of the King's subjects, and the failure of other means to maintain the King's government." This response was bruited about by Richard Cogdell, chairman of the New Bern-Craven County Committee of Safety, as a candid admission of Martin's guilt.<sup>18</sup>

Martin may well have been innocent of the charge, for on June 30 he wrote Dartmouth a letter protesting the report of his involvement as "most infamous." But in the same letter he made it clear that the large black population occasioned "a circumstance that would facilitate exceedingly the reduction of those colonies who are very sensible of their weakness arising from it." Another thwarted slave rebellion in July presented further evidence to call into question Martin's intentions. On July 8, the committees for Beaufort and Pitt counties got wind of an insurrection that was to take place that night. Moving swiftly, the two committees took into custody nearly forty blacks who, after questioning, revealed "a deep laid horrid tragic plan laid for destroying the inhabitants of this province." The plan called for

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<sup>18</sup>John Simpson to Richard Cogdell, July 15, 1775, William L. Saunders, ed., The Colonial Records of North Carolina (Raleigh: Josephus Daniels, 1886-90), 10:94; Janet Schaw, Journal of a Lady of Quality, Evangeline W. Andrews, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 199; Martin to Lewis Henry DeRossett, June 24, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:8; Broadside by Cogdell, August 2, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:9. See Robert L. Ganyard, The Emergence of North Carolina's Revolutionary State Government (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1978) for a complete discussion of related events in North Carolina.

slaves to murder their masters, set the neighborhood on fire, then proceed to the back country where they were to be met by persons "appointed and armed by Government ... and as a further reward they were to be settled in a free government of their own." The driving force behind this uprising was reputed to be Captain John Collett, commander of Fort Johnston. Collett was further implicated as a fomenter of slave rebellion when he was found to have "actually concealed in the fort" a number of runaway slaves "which he had instigated to revolt from their masters."<sup>19</sup>

Across the Atlantic, Dartmouth realized the precarious position in which Dunmore stood and urged his subordinate to make good on his threat. He authorized the shipment of two thousand muskets to the governor "to be put into the hands of such faithful adherents as shall stand forth in his defense against the lawless rabble who have dared to menace his destruction." A week later he increased the number of weapons to three thousand, included two hundred rounds of powder and shot per musket, and explicitly authorized Dunmore to recruit blacks for his provincial corps. He reiterated this authorization on August 2 by calling Dunmore's plan "very encouraging."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Dunmore's superiors may have been pondering the efficacy of employing slaves as infantrymen well in advance of the governor's threat. Rumors that the British planned to

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<sup>19</sup>Martin to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, Davies, 9:211-13; Simpson to Cogdell, July 15, 1775, Saunders, 10:94-95; Report by Cogdell, August 5, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:40.

<sup>20</sup>Dartmouth to Gage, July 1, 1775, Carter, 2:199; Dartmouth to Dunmore, July 12, 1775, Davies, 11:45; Dartmouth to Dunmore, August 2, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:6. Dunmore did not receive this shipment of ordnance until December 19, whereupon he sent one thousand stand of arms and ammunition in proportion to Governor Martin (Dunmore to Dartmouth, January 4, 1776, Davies, 12:62, 65).

free and arm the slaves began circulating on both sides of the Atlantic as early as December 1774 and continued all through the following year. William Bradford wrote James Madison about a letter from a gentleman in England that had been read in a Philadelphia coffeehouse on January 3, 1775. The letter alleged "the design of administration to pass an act (in case of rupture) declaring all slaves and servants free that would take up arms against the Americans." On March 29, another gentleman in London urged a friend in North Carolina to "sell your slave-estate" because he had heard on good authority that all American slaves were to be seized and "sold in the French and Spanish islands, the profits arising to reimburse the great expense of ships, troops, etc. sent to America." On May 3, Arthur Lee, an American lawyer in London and agent for Massachusetts, wrote to Henry Laurens of South Carolina advising him "that a plan was laid before [the] administration, for instigating the slaves to insurrection." On August 24, a third gentleman in London wrote to a friend in Philadelphia that "the ministry have thoughts of declaring all your Negroes free, and to arm them ... you know the great number in the southern provinces; if got in arms against you, it would much embarrass you." On October 11, His Majesty received a petition from a London group expressing "indignation and horror" at "reports of slaves incited to insurrection" that had "prevailed without refutation."<sup>21</sup>

Edmund Burke addressed the issue of inciting America's slaves in Parliament on March 22, 1775. He doubted that "the

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<sup>21</sup>Bradford to Madison, January 4, 1775, Hutchinson, 1:132; Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in London to his Friend in North Carolina, March 29, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 2:242; Drayton, 1:231; Extract of a Letter Received in Philadelphia from London, August 24, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:256-57; Address, Memorial, and Petition of the Gentlemen, Merchants and Traders of London to His Majesty, October 11, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:1010-11.

high aristocratic spirit of Virginia and the southern colonies" could be subdued by "a general enfranchisement of their slaves." In Burke's opinion, Roman history was filled with accounts of slaves devotedly serving their masters in times of upheaval; moreover, slaves would undoubtedly question British motives in offering freedom because of Britain's unabashed involvement in and encouragement of the slave trade. Most ominously, the Americans might retaliate and also offer freedom to slaves in exchange for military service.<sup>22</sup>

Burke's last point was not as far-fetched as one might think. Less than four months later, a resident of Gloucester Town, Virginia, suggested that it was "high time to show Administration how little they have to expect from [raising the slaves] by arming our trusty slaves ourselves." Another Virginian suggested that, instead of fighting slaves, the patriots should train thirty or forty thousand of their bondsmen as soldiers and haul them off to invade the British Isles.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Burke to Commons, March 22, 1775, Walter W. Cobbett, ed., The Parliamentary History of England (London: T.C. Hansard, 1812-20; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1966), 18:502. Sylvia Frey, Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) refers to Bradford's letter of January 4, 1775 and Burke's speech of March 22, 1775 as proof that a proposal to free the slaves had been introduced into Commons (pp. 54-55). Though rumors were clearly flying to that effect, a close reading of Cobbett reveals no such motion.

<sup>23</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), July 13, 1775; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), September 22, 1775. Of course, many blacks did fight on the side of the patriots. For a complete discussion of this phenomenon in America in general and Virginia in particular, see Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), and Luther P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," Journal of Negro History 27 (1942), 247-87.

The origin of the rumors remains a matter of conjecture. Sir William Draper, a political writer who had traveled extensively in the southern colonies, published a scheme for "the Negro command" in a "Scotch magazine." Draper's plan, which probably appeared sometime in 1774, received wide circulation throughout the colonies, especially Virginia. How seriously Draper's plan was considered by the British government is not known. Another possible source was a plan presented by Lord North, Prime Minister of Great Britain, to King George III in December 1774. North's plan for prosecuting a war with America had been reviewed and found acceptable by Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice of England, who presided over the Somerset case in 1772. This landmark trial arose when James Somerset, the slave of the Virginian Charles Stewart who had been carried to London by his master, sued for his freedom, and its proceedings were covered extensively in the Virginia Gazette throughout the summer of 1772. Mansfield's decision to free Somerset was widely believed at the time to mean the end of slavery in England. A number of Virginia's slaves certainly interpreted the decision in this light, and believed that if they could somehow set foot on English soil they would be free. Amy and Bacchus, two slaves belonging to John Finnie of Surry County, attempted to do that very thing. So to Virginians such as Arthur and William Lee, the most prolific of the American correspondents in London, Mansfield's association with North's plan may have conjured up images of marauding ex-slaves.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Undated diary entry [December?] for 1775, Jack P. Greene, ed. The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778 (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1987), 2:959; North to George III, December 1774, John W. Fortescue, ed., The Correspondence of King George the Third (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967), 3:158; Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), June 4, July 23, July 30, August 27, and September 10, 1772, and September 30, 1773.

Dunmore believed that the American correspondents in London were simply using the terror-laden image of slave insurrection to flog the fencesitters at home into a proactive patriot stance. He told Dartmouth that the Lees were "the principal promoters of all the disturbances in this country" and "the persons to whom [their] letters are addressed have been the very principal promoters of the rebellion here." Probably, the rumors merely reflected the fact that senior British officials and members of Parliament were indeed contemplating ways to exploit, if not actively employ, the hundreds of thousands of slaves living in the colonies.<sup>25</sup>

On October 15, 1775, North suggested to the King that rebels in three American provinces were in a "perilous situation" owing to "the great number of their Negro slaves and the small population of white inhabitants." As a result, these colonies could be subdued with "a small force from home." North's proposal, which did not specifically call for raising the slaves, merely taking advantage of their presence, resulted in the unsuccessful "Southern Campaign" of 1776. When questioned, North denied ever having considered arming American slaves. When asked to defend the arming of slaves by Dunmore, he declared that the governor "did not call on them to murder their masters ... but only to take up arms in defense of their sovereign." Should Parliament find anything "reprehensible" in Dunmore's proclamation, North offered his assurance that it would "be attended to."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, January 4, 1776, Davies, 12:64. The Lees, particularly Arthur, may have stretched the truth deliberately regarding Administration's plans to arm American slaves. Louis W. Potts writes in Arthur Lee: A Virtuous Revolutionary (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) that "the crisis beckoned to his theatrical impulses, and he reveled in the role he had designated for himself, keystone of Anglo-American opposition" (p. 132).

<sup>26</sup>North to George III, October 15, 1775, Fortescue, 3:266; George III to North, October 16, 1775, W. Bodham Donne, ed.,

A debate of sorts concerning the propriety of arming slaves against the rebels took place in the House of Commons on October 26, 1775. The King opened the second session of the Fourteenth Parliament by calling for the military suppression of the rebellion in the American colonies and specifically proposed the use of "foreign and papist" troops in the struggle. The motion to approve the King's speech was seconded by William Henry Lyttleton, former royal governor of South Carolina and Jamaica, who remarked that "the southern colonies were weak, on account of the number of Negroes in them," and that "if a few regiments were sent there, the Negroes would rise, and embrue their hands in the blood of their masters." Lyttleton was immediately challenged by Governor George Johnstone. "The scheme he alludes to, of calling forth the slaves, is too black and horrid to be adopted," declared Johnstone, who then explained why the plan would not work by reiterating the arguments advanced by Burke seven months earlier.<sup>27</sup>

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The Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 1:275; North to Commons, November 20, 1775, Cobbett, 18:994; North to Commons, February 6, 1778, Ibid., 19:708. Frey suggests that North wanted to augment loyalist forces in the southern colonies with slaves and cites his letter of October 15 as proof (Water, 67). However, a close reading reveals that North was only suggesting that the presence of slaves be turned to advantage. Frey further states that "Lord North later claimed that it was the American decision to enlist blacks that forced Britain to follow suit," and cites his speech to Commons on November 20 as proof (Water, 79). Again, a close reading reveals that North was actually talking about Indians, not blacks: "There was never any idea of employing the Negroes or the Indians, until the Americans themselves had first applied to them; that General Carleton [governor of Quebec] did then apply to them; and even then, it was only for the defense of his own province."

<sup>27</sup>Cobbett, 18:695-96, 726, 730-33, 747. Frey reports Lyttleton's second as a motion to raise the slaves, which was eventually defeated 278 to 108 (Water, 67). The actual vote concerned using force against America, and the 108 voted against force of any kind, much less arming the slaves.

On November 2, 1775, Parliament came as close as it ever would to arming America's slaves. David Hartley rose in the House of Commons and suggested giving all slaves in America the right to trial by jury. Should the colonies agree, then all colonial grievances such as taxation would be redressed. Hartley offered this plan as a conciliatory measure, designed to assert Parliament's authority over America while also giving the colonies much autonomy. On December 7, Hartley expounded at length on his "Act of Test" which, if accepted in America, would annul all acts of Parliament concerning America passed since 1763. At the same time, Hartley made it clear that he also intended to begin ridding the British Empire of slavery. Except for a second, Hartley's proposal received absolutely no encouragement.<sup>28</sup>

Burke and Johnstone were correct in at least one instance when they stated that slaves might question British motives for setting them free. Caesar, "the famous barber of Yorktown," refused to believe that any slave would be so injudicious as to flee to Dunmore so long as his lordship withheld freedom from his own bondsmen. But while Roman slaves may have thought like Caesar, many American ones did not. As early as November 1774, slaves in the Old Dominion anticipated the day when British troops would land and give them the occasion to revolt. One group selected a commander to lead them when the troops arrived, "that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom." In April 1775, shortly after the Gunpowder Incident, two blacks were sentenced to death in Norfolk Borough for conspiring to raise a slave insurrection there. The appearance of a like-minded group of slaves in Williamsburg at about the same time

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<sup>28</sup>Cobbett, 18:846, 1047-49.

provided further evidence of blacks' willingness to fight for their emancipation.<sup>29</sup>

The moment many slaves had been waiting for occurred on July 31, 1775. On that date sixty privates of the Fourteenth Regiment and their officers arrived in Norfolk with word that another detachment was not far behind. The news produced "exceeding bad effects" on blacks in the vicinity, and a number of them, doubtless familiar with Dunmore's threats of the previous spring, presented themselves to the commanders of the British warships riding in the Elizabeth River. Paul Loyal, mayor of Norfolk, worked to secure his constituents' human property from the Royal Navy by seeking assurances from Captains John Macartney of the Mercury and Matthew Squire of the Otter that neither would encourage runaway slaves to apply on board for protection. Macartney put his position in writing in a manner that was both reassuring and threatening: "The same principles which have induced me not to harbor the slaves of any individual in this province will operate with me to protect the property of all loyal subjects." Squire returned several slaves to their masters after allowing the runaways to remain on board for a number of weeks. The two captains received Norfolk's thanks for "their generous behavior" in "discouraging the elopement of slaves."<sup>30</sup>

Squire soon changed his tactics, and before long gained a reputation as a villain on both sides of Hampton Roads.

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<sup>29</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), December 9, 1775, Scribner, 4: 464-65; Madison to Bradford, November 26, 1774, Hutchinson, 1:130; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), April 29, 1775 (supplement).

<sup>30</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, August 3, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:373; Macartney to Loyal, August 12, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:93; Norfolk Intelligencer, August 2, 1775, Scribner, 3:381; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), August 25, 1775 supplement; Loyal to Macartney, August 14, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:93.

The committee of safety of Norfolk County noted his "most unfriendly disposition to the liberties of this continent" for "promoting disaffection among the slaves, and in concealing them for a considerable time on board" the Otter. Meanwhile, the captain earned the opprobrium of the citizens of Elizabeth City County by offering aid, comfort, and accommodations to all slaves who petitioned him while the Otter patrolled the York River on the county's northern shore.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of August, Squire undertook an active role vis-a-vis the colony's black inhabitants. In addition to harboring slaves who had fled their masters, the captain sought out those who had not. Some he impressed from three passage-boats he overtook in the Chesapeake Bay, but most were liberated from coastal and riverine plantations. Squire put his new recruits to work raiding the rebels. The captain targeted unprotected plantations in the neighborhoods outside Norfolk and Hampton, then sent the runaways ashore at night to encourage more runaways to escape as well as to liberate all the hogs, poultry, sheep, and other provisions they could find and carry back on board. By the end of October, Squire's success was being duplicated by his brother officers, much to the chagrin and frustration of the Virginia Committee of Safety, whose impotence at preventing these nocturnal visits was embarrassingly apparent.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Proceedings of Norfolk County Committee of Safety, August 16, 1775, Scribner, 3:452-53; Elizabeth City County-Hampton Town Committee of Safety to Squire, September 16, 1775, Ibid., 4:119.

<sup>32</sup>Virginia Gazette (Purdie), September 15, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:679-80; Elizabeth City County-Hampton Town Committee of Safety to Squire, September 16, 1775, Scribner, 4:119-20; "To the Inhabitants of Virginia," October 19, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:1104; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), October 26, 1775, Scribner, 4:282-83. For a more complete treatment of black loyalists as liberation fighters for their race, see James W. St. G. Walker, "Blacks as American Loyalists: The Slaves' War for Independence," Historical Reflections 2, No. 1 (1975), 51-67.

The Committee enjoyed a singular piece of luck against Squire on September 2 when a tender under his command ran aground off Hampton in a hurricane and its occupants were forced to flee by land. On board the tender were Aaron and Johnny, two runaways from King and Queen County, who were quickly reunited with their erstwhile master, Wilson Miles Cary. Also retaken by the colonists was Joe Harris, a mulatto man claimed by Henry King of Hampton. Aaron and Johnny had apparently been employed by Squire since early August, while Harris had served as pilot of the grounded tender.<sup>33</sup>

Although whites clearly frowned on such slave-harboring activities, blacks just as clearly approved. The Virginia Gazette reported that Norfolk and Portsmouth were "full of slaves, ready for an insurrection at the beck of their leader [Dunmore]." On September 30, when a detachment of the Fourteenth Regiment absconded with the printing paraphernalia of John Holt, publisher of the Norfolk Intelligencer, the soldiers were joined in a lusty cheer at dockside by a large group of exuberant blacks.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the success with which he was able to recruit blacks, Dunmore was not thinking, even in mid-October, of ex-slaves as soldiers. Instead, he placed his hopes for ending the conflict with a few regiments of His Majesty's foot soldiers. He also considered using indentured servants,

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<sup>33</sup>Cary to Alexander Purdie: An Open Letter, September 4, 1775, Scribner, 4:69; Deposition of George Gray, September 4, 1775, Ibid., 4:69-70. Other slaves seized by the loyalists included one from Edward Archer, two from John Jones, two from Mr. Harrison of Brandon, and one from Anne Cocke of Jamestown (Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, June 14, 15, and 21, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:1567 and Scribner, 7:502-3, 576; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 22, 1776). None of the seized slaves' names were recorded.

<sup>34</sup>"Observations on the Conduct of Lord Dunmore," October 27, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:1191; Ibid., 4th ser., 3:847.

convicts, Indians, and the French settlers around Pittsburgh. William Cowley, servant to Major John Connolly, Dunmore's chief agent at Fort Pitt, testified that the major had permission from General Gage to raise the latter two groups while Dunmore would raise the former two. Cowley said nothing about slaves.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, despite the fear factor, blacks were not particularly attractive recruits. Colonial law forbade slaves to use weapons of any kind, so most slaves hardly knew one end of a musket from the other. Presumably, the few who could shoot straight would have a much tougher time procuring their own firearms than might either white servants or convicts, who were also prohibited from using weapons but could more easily pass for freemen and therefore obtain their own arms. This consideration was important because Dunmore had neither muskets nor cartridges with which to supply a civilian army. The munitions promised him in July by Dartmouth had not yet arrived and the several hundred stand of arms kept in the governor's palace had been seized by the patriots in June. Consequently, the governor limited his recruitment of runaways to the handful he seized from the coastal plantations of patriots, and when he led a force of regulars, marines, and sailors on five separate raids in mid-October to search for patriot ordnance in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, his blacks, who numbered less than a hundred, were left behind.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Deposition of William Cowley, October 12, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:1047-48.

<sup>36</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, October 5, 1775, Davies, 11:137; Dunmore to Dartmouth, June 25, 1775, Ibid., 9:205; Dunmore to Dartmouth, October 22, 1775, Ibid., 11:161-62; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, August 3, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:373; Captain Samuel Leslie to Gage, November 1 and November 26, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:1716-17.

In early November, Dunmore received a shipment of five hundred stand of arms from New York as well as seventy-four privates plus officers of the Fourteenth. Emboldened by both arrivals and the ease with which his forces swept aside the colonial militia during the forays of October, Dunmore set out on November 14 to crush a patriot force at Great Bridge. Finding the bridge abandoned and hearing reports that the patriots were now at Kemp's Landing, Dunmore attacked the enemy there with a force consisting of one hundred and nine regulars, twenty-two volunteers and, for the first time, a small number of blacks. Like the skirmishes in October, this engagement was an unqualified British victory. The patriot army of between three and four hundred quickly broke in the middle and ran pell-mell, and in the ensuing pursuit Dunmore's blacks got their first taste of combat.<sup>37</sup>

A militia company commanded by Colonel Joseph Hutchings attempted to take cover in a swamp. As the colonel searched for a hiding place, he was discovered by a black armed only with a sword. What emotions must have surged through the breast of each man as they recognized one another, for Hutchings now found himself face-to-face with one of his former slaves! Silently and without hesitation, the colonel raised his pistol, fired pointblank at his adversary, and missed. In retaliation, the runaway leaped at Hutchings, swung his cold steel blade with a vengeance, and hacked the colonel in the face, wounding him grievously. While the ex-slave stood the victor over the slumped body of his former

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<sup>37</sup>Virginia Committee of Safety to the Virginia Delegates in Philadelphia, November 11, 1775, Scribner, 4:379; Dunmore to Dartmouth, January 4, 1776, Davies, 12:65; Leslie to Gage, November 26, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:1717; Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 6, 1775, Davies, 12:59.

master, several blacks ran up, seized Hutchings, and triumphantly dragged him off to Dunmore.<sup>38</sup>

Not long after the rout, a black "dressed in a suit of British regimentals, and armed with a gun," showed up at the house of Charles Sayes, not far from Kemp's Landing. He accosted two women who were guests in the home and then searched the house for rebels. Finding none, he left with a threat to return. When the women complained to Dunmore about the incident, the governor laughed it off, explaining that such insolence was to be expected from "these black rascals."<sup>39</sup>

The victory at Kemp's Landing was the high point of Dunmore's campaign. By routing the patriot militia, he took an important first step toward securing Norfolk and Princess Anne counties as a land base from which to operate, and with over 170 regulars and the newly-arrived arms, he began raising an army of civilians. He hoisted the King's standard immediately after the fight and, perhaps in conscious imitation of Nathaniel Bacon a century before, proclaimed the following: "And I do hereby further declare all ... Negroes ... (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's troops, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this colony to a proper sense of their duty to His Majesty's crown and dignity." He then ordered the distribution of copies of the proclamation which had been printed on board the William on

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<sup>38</sup>Edmund Pendleton to Richard Lee, November 27, 1775, David J. Mays, ed., The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734-1804 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), 1:132-33.

<sup>39</sup>William Maxwell, "My Mother," as told by Helen Maxwell, Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary, Edward W. James, ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 2:134-35. Maxwell names the owner of the house "Sayer," but land and other records indicate that "Sayes" is the correct spelling.

November 7 using John Holt's former equipment. Within days runaway slaves began appearing in Dunmore's camp.<sup>40</sup>

That slaves would side with the British to fight for liberty against patriots fighting to avoid "enslavement" is one of the grand ironies in the story of the Ethiopian Regiment, but by no means the only one. Dunmore, liberator of slaves, never freed his own bondsmen. His hastily-concocted yet slowly-executed plan to foment a servile uprising may have been predated by one thoroughly developed by senior British officials a full year earlier. Rather than drawing support to himself as intended, his threats to raise the slaves provided the patriots with their most effective recruiting tool.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, the entire Ethiopian saga was made possible not by the patriots or imperialists but by the slaves themselves. By demonstrating repeatedly their willingness to take up arms in pursuit of freedom, blacks prompted whites to open the window of opportunity through which the bright beams of liberty shone. On November 14, 1775, Virginia's blacks saw those beams shine brighter than ever before.

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<sup>40</sup>Monthly Return of Fourteenth Regiment, December 1, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:350; Dunmore to General William Howe, November 30, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:1713-14; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 25, 1775, Ibid., 4th ser., 3:1385.

<sup>41</sup>Luther P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," Journal of Negro History 27 (1942), 247-87, dismisses the Ethiopian "event" because it "had no permanent effect" in freeing significant numbers of slaves (p. 249). But he also notes that Dunmore's proclamation prompted patriot recruiters to secure the services of slaves to prevent them from enlisting with the British (pp. 256-57), by which means many slaves earned their freedom (pp. 274-75).

CHAPTER TWO:  
GIVE ME LIBERTY

The beacon of freedom, built by blacks and lit by Dunmore, drew slaves to the governor like moths to a flame. Word of the proclamation was spread up and down the rivers by the tenders of the Royal Navy as well as by the slave network, and the governor was joined almost immediately by about two hundred former bondsmen. By early December 1775, their number had grown to over four hundred. For most, the journey from slavery to freedom required little more than a short walk from their homes in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, where Dunmore ruled most securely and where few obstacles, material or otherwise, impeded their flight. For others, the distance between themselves and the governor, coupled with the feebleness of His Majesty's reign in their county, demanded greater determination and ingenuity. Slaves in this circumstance who regarded Dunmore as their liberator eschewed the tedious hike to Norfolk and traveled instead by boat.<sup>1</sup>

Harry, Lewis, Aaron, and Matthew comprised a typical group in a typical escape. On November 26, the four, all of whom belonged to Edmund Ruffin of Prince George County, went off in a yawl down the James River with two other, unnamed

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Carter Nicholas to Virginia Delegates in Congress, November 25, 1775, Scribner, 4:470; Samuel McCroskey to the President of Congress at Philadelphia, November 25, 1775, Scribner, 4:467; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 30, 1775; Woodford to Pendleton, November 26 and December 5, 1775, "The Letters of Colonel William Woodford, Colonel Robert Howe, and General Charles Lee to Edmund Pendleton, President of the Virginia Convention," Richmond College Historical Papers (RCHP)(Richmond, VA: The College, 1915), 1:104, 112-13. For a more complete discussion of how slaves regarded the governor, see Benjamin Quarles, "Lord Dunmore as Liberator," William and Mary Quarterly 15 (October 1958), 494-507.

slaves. Somehow the anonymous two were captured and jailed while Ruffin's four managed to link up with Dunmore. Others were less successful. One group of twelve runaways commandeered several small boats and sailed away. Before long, the little fleet ran afoul of a nest of trigger-happy patriots. Two of the blacks were wounded, one mortally, in a one-sided battle in which the unarmed slaves "made very little resistance." The eleven survivors were incarcerated in the Williamsburg jail. Another group, probably from the vicinity of Richmond, sailed down the James River in a thirty-foot canoe with "a large split in each side, and blocks for four oars." These runaways, captured in Surry County, never got close to Dunmore.<sup>2</sup>

Upon their arrival at his lordship's camp, the runaways were formed into companies and christened "Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment." The black corps was led by white Tory officers and sergeants, but the actual structure of the unit is unknown. Perhaps it was organized like the Queen's Own Loyal Virginia Regiment, a unit composed of white loyalists that Dunmore was raising at the same time. Under the command of a lieutenant colonel and a major, the Queen's Own was to consist of five hundred men formed into ten companies of fifty. Each company would be officered by a captain, two lieutenants, an ensign, and "noncommissioned officers in proportion." More likely, the Ethiopians were organized much less formally, perhaps intended to serve as auxiliaries to the Queen's Own. In any event, Dunmore clearly intended that the two regiments work together in some fashion, because he placed both units under the command of Major Thomas Byrd, son

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 30, 1775 and January 10, 1776; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter, February 3, 1776).

of Virginia's William Byrd III and an officer in the British Fourteenth Regiment.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Dunmore showed little interest in the fighting potential of his ex-slave recruits. Ever since he first threatened to free and arm them, he estimated the value of slave-soldiers solely as a means of securing the neutrality, if not outright loyalty, of the colonists, and his actions immediately following the proclamation showed that he still felt the same. Many masters discovered that their slaves had joined Dunmore, and in an effort to regain their property, swore the oath of allegiance to the Crown. No sooner were the words uttered than his lordship expelled the slaves in question from his ranks and restored them to their former masters.<sup>4</sup>

Although Dunmore did not plan to make soldiers out of the runaways, neither did he plan to sell them, as the patriots often claimed. Not long after the governor's proclamation of emancipation was made public, John Pinkney, editor of the Virginia Gazette, published a warning to slaves in his newspaper. Once Dunmore got what he wanted, claimed the anonymous author, all slaves who had joined the governor would either be returned to their masters or sold in the West Indies. On December 15, Alexander Purdie claimed in his newspaper, also called the Virginia Gazette, that "Lord Dunmore intends shortly for the West Indies with his cargo of slaves, to make the most of them before his departure for England." These charges would be repeated even after his lordship departed the colony for good. Apparently, the rumor

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<sup>3</sup>Dunmore to Howe, November 30, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:1714; Thomas Byrd to William Byrd, February 23, 1776, "The Letters of the Byrd Family," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (1931), 39:227.

<sup>4</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 30, 1775.

was fueled by two letters written by loyalist merchants to their relatives back home which had fallen into patriot hands and were published by Purdie. Robert Shedden reported on November 10 that John Brown "has begun to load his schooner" with the Jamaica-bound cargo, and that Dunmore would provide the necessary protection for the vessel. Brown wrote on November 21 that he had already shipped one hundred thousand to that island, and expected to receive the princely sum of twenty pounds per thousand, or less than half a shilling each. If this price seems ridiculously low, it is because Brown was not selling slaves, but staves, barrel staves. By misreading the two letters, intentionally or otherwise, the patriots gave rise to a rumor that served their own propaganda interests but had no basis in fact.<sup>5</sup>

Willing neither to arm them as soldiers nor sell them as slaves, the governor eagerly employed his Ethiopians as sappers. Instead of muskets he issued them shovels, and sent them off to dig ditches. The town of Norfolk was completely entrenched within two weeks of the proclamation, and the Ethiopians did most if not all of the spadework. Pinkney reported that the ex-slaves were put to work "digging entrenchments in wet ground, till at length the severity of their labour forced many of them to fly." He later announced that, in addition to the hard work, the lot of Dunmore's recruits, black and white, was "hungry bellies, naked backs, and no fuel; besides, in other respects, the most cruel and inhuman treatment." Undoubtedly some runaways balked at

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<sup>5</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 23, 1775; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), December 15, 1775; Robert Shedden of Portsmouth to J. Shedden of Glasgow, dated November 10, 1775, Virginia Gazette (Purdie), December 22, 1775; Extract from a Letter from John Brown of Norfolk dated November 21, to William Brown in London, Virginia Gazette (Purdie), December 29, 1775.

laboring so exhaustingly, but whatever complaints deserters made known to their fellows back home were insufficient to deter a steady stream of blacks rushing to join in the digging.<sup>6</sup>

While the Ethiopians fortified Norfolk against attack, Dunmore concentrated on the larger question of how to secure the counties of Norfolk and Princess Anne. The governor enjoyed greater backing from the inhabitants of these two counties than from anyone else in the colony. Their loyalty to the Crown was so strong that they "amply and regularly supplied [Dunmore's forces] with provisions and refreshments of every kind" until the British left Virginia in August 1776. Such enthusiastic support provided the governor with a rather secure base for his operations, as the two counties were almost completely surrounded by water and marsh. To the north lay Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake Bay, to the east the Atlantic Ocean, to the west and south the Elizabeth River and the Great Dismal Swamp. So effective were these natural barriers that only two land approaches afforded the patriots access to Dunmore's stronghold. One was via the Great Bridge, at the village of the same name, about twelve miles south-southeast of Norfolk over the southern branch of the Elizabeth, and the other at an abandoned ferry six miles upstream from the bridge. Since his efforts at recruiting for the Queen's Own were proceeding "very slowly," Dunmore for the first time looked to his Ethiopians with an eye for their soldierly talents. In a reversal of his earlier policy, he took their shovels, gave them muskets, ordered them shoes, emblazoned their chests with the motto "Liberty for Slaves," replaced their Tory officers with sergeants of

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<sup>6</sup>Captain Fordyce to Captain Urquhart, December 1, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:350; Captain Squire to Admiral Graves, December 2, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:352; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 30 and December 13, 1775.

the Fourteenth, and dispatched them to hold the two key approaches.<sup>7</sup>

In all likelihood, Dunmore's slave recruits received no military training at all from their allies before being deployed in defense of the approaches. The British had only five hundred muskets with which to arm the two volunteer regiments, and the governor clearly preferred putting them in the hands of white people. The vast majority of blacks who were issued weapons had precious little experience in firing them, since Virginia's slave codes prohibited bondsmen from possessing firearms of any kind. Those Ethiopians lucky enough to receive a firearm probably got no target practice because of a shortage of cartridges and cartridge paper. And so the Ethiopians marched off to war with hardly a clue as to how to defend themselves against their enemies.<sup>8</sup>

Although they were never taught basic weaponry and combat skills, the Ethiopians had been trained with great thoroughness and rigor in the ways of obeying orders. This training came not at the hands of the British but from their former masters. One can hardly conceive of a more effective

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<sup>7</sup>General Charles Lee to Pendleton, May 4, 1776, "The Lee Papers," Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1871 (New York: The Society, 1872), 1:468; Undated manuscript map, Ivor Noel-Hume, 1775--Another Part of the Field (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), Plate 21; Dunmore to Lord George Germain, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:101; Woodford to Pendleton, December 4, 1775, RCHP, 1:106; Neil Jamieson [Norfolk merchant] to Messrs. Glassford, Gordon, Monteath, and Co., Glasgow [Scottish merchants], December 2, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:346; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), December 2, 1775.

<sup>8</sup>The standard procedure for fighting with muskets involved a large group of soldiers so equipped pointing their pieces in the same general direction, firing in unison, then quickly reloading. Success depended less on accuracy than it did on teamwork, and so extensive drilling was essential to produce accurate, effective fire (Noel-Hume, pp. 424-26).

regimen for the development of unquestioning obedience than the fields and workshops of the colonial plantations. From these boot camps without end, his lordship's black recruits obtained the most advanced instruction from Virginia's strictest disciplinarians in the necessity of obeying orders swiftly and without question.

Of the two approaches, the Great Bridge was the more important, and Dunmore devoted most of his attention to its defense. The road crossing the bridge skirted the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp, and the land on both sides of the river was quite marshy. Although the bridge itself was short, a causeway connected it to firm land and the village south of the branch, and the bridge and causeway combined were about half a mile long. The bridge was wide enough for six men to march abreast, but too narrow to allow room for maneuvering. The causeway was much wider, as houses lined both sides of the road. North of the bridge was a small patch of dry land next to the road, and it was on this patch that Dunmore had his men build a fort.<sup>9</sup>

The patriots were not impressed with Fort Murray, named after the governor, and derisively called it the "Hog Pen." Built of timber, the little stockade was modestly outfitted with two four-pounders, some swivels, and a few other light guns. But because of its position next to the road and at the edge of the bridge, the fort's cannons commanded the road the entire length of the causeway and halfway through the village. Moreover, because of the surrounding swamp, Fort Murray could only be attacked "by exposing most of the troops to [its] fire upon a large open marsh." No evidence

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<sup>9</sup>"A View of the Great Bridge near Norfolk, Virginia," undated manuscript map, Noel-Hume, Plate 22; Catesby W. Stewart, The Life of Brigadier General William Woodford of the American Revolution (Richmond, VA: Whittet and Shepperson, 1973), 1:488.

confirms who built the fort, but surely the work was done by members of the Ethiopian Regiment. Supervised by a lieutenant of the Fourteenth, the fort was garrisoned upon its completion in the last week of November 1775 by about fifty Ethiopians and twenty or so Tories from Norfolk. They were soon reinforced by a detachment of British regulars.<sup>10</sup>

The abandoned ferry was not as important as the Great Bridge because the road that crossed the river there did not lead directly to Norfolk. Instead, it took a wide sweep to the north and east before doubling back to the northwest and Kemp's Landing, at the head of the Elizabeth River's eastern branch. Nonetheless, this crossing provided access to Norfolk, and Dunmore moved to control it as well. Here, too, both banks of the river were marshy; only at the landings on each side was the ground sufficiently firm to support the maneuvers of a body of infantrymen. On the Norfolk side of the river, not far from the landing, stood the vacant ferryhouse. In early December, a British force consisting of thirty-seven Ethiopians plus some regulars and Tories occupied the house and erected some fortifications around it.<sup>11</sup>

The patriots responded to these British initiatives with shadowing moves of their own. At the Great Bridge, the rebels constructed a barricade across the road between the village and the causeway and positioned sentinels in the houses on the causeway. At the abandoned ferry, a patriot

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<sup>10</sup>Stewart, 1:478-79; Woodford to Pendleton, December 4, 1775, RCHP, 1:106-7; Woodford to Pendleton, November 26, 1775, RCHP, 1:104; Leslie to Gage, December 1, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:349.

<sup>11</sup>"A View of the Great Bridge near Norfolk, Virginia," undated manuscript maps, Noel-Hume, Plates 21 and 22; Woodford to Pendleton, December 4 and 5, 1775, RCHP, 1:106-7, 110-11.

force of forty-two minutemen took up an unfortified position on the bank opposite the ferryhouse.<sup>12</sup>

During the last week of November, the patriots attempted to neutralize Fort Murray, but to no avail. Unable to assault the fort directly because of the narrow bridge and the lack of cover for attackers, the rebels tried more subtle tactics. They built a number of rafts and attempted to float across the river undetected, but each time the Ethiopians and their allies repulsed the attack. Between fifteen and twenty patriots were killed in these attacks while the loyalists suffered a total of two casualties, both slightly wounded.<sup>13</sup>

The patriots next placed snipers in the houses on the causeway. These vacant structures provided good cover for the rebel riflemen and put them in close range of the fort. This tactic proved to be more successful than the raft attacks. The patriot Lt. Col. Charles Scott reported that on the first day his snipers shot and killed sixteen blacks and five whites. The loyalists quickly realized that the houses had to go. On the night of December 3, a party of Ethiopians snuck out of Fort Murray, crept across the bridge, and set fire to the house closest to the fort before they were detected. Four other houses on the causeway were soon blazing out of control as well. As the Ethiopians scampered back across the bridge toward the safety of the fort, one of them was shot by a patriot sentinel. Otherwise, the patriots watched helplessly as the five buildings burned to the ground, since the bright light from the conflagration made tempting targets of firefighters. By daybreak, the five houses provided cover for rebel sniper fire no more.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>See note 11.

<sup>13</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 6, 1775, Davies, 12:59.

<sup>14</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 4, 1775, RCHP, 1:107; Col. Scott to Capt. Southall, December 4, 1775, Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), December 9, 1775.

Meanwhile, at the ferry, the British struck first. On December 3, a landing party composed of Ethiopians and regulars attempted to cross the river in three boats and assault the patriot position while the rest of the force covered the attack with musket fire. Many minutemen, unnerved by the roar of the musket volleys, fled for the safety of Great Bridge. The remaining colonials held their posts well enough that the landing party was driven back across the river with seven casualties. One of the dead was the party's commander, undoubtedly a regular, but the other six were probably Ethiopians. The patriots were reinforced with about forty men from Great Bridge, and all the next day, from dawn until dusk, the opposing sides traded shots across the river. The patriots, whose rifles were more accurate at that distance than the "Brown Bess" muskets of their enemies, inflicted an unknown number of casualties. The Ethiopians were unable to hit the first patriot.<sup>15</sup>

Early the next morning, the outnumbered Ethiopians narrowly escaped a disastrous defeat. Under cover of darkness, about one hundred patriots crossed the river a mile upstream shortly after midnight on December 4. They intended to attack the house and fortifications from the rear while their comrades on the other side laid down a heavy barrage, thereby trapping the Ethiopians in a deadly crossfire. But

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<sup>15</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 4, 1775, RCHP, 1:106-7; "Extract of a Letter from Lt. Col. [Charles] Scott to His Friend [Capt. Southall?] in Williamsburg," December 4, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:171. The precise identity of who attacked by boat and who covered the attack from shore cannot be determined from the sources. However, since the members of the attack party could not fire their weapons without tipping over the boat, the local commander would have kept his best marksmen, the regulars, on land. Also, since the attackers presented easy targets as they crossed the river, he would have put his most expendable troops, the Ethiopians, in the boats. Lastly, when the British commander at Fort Murray sent out raiders to burn the houses on the causeway, he sent

as the advance party approached the house, an alert black sentry challenged them. Upon receiving no answer, he opened fire. Several trigger-happy patriots returned the fire without waiting for the order, killing the sentry but further alerting the garrison. A furious fifteen-minute gun battle ensued during which the house caught on fire. One Ethiopian was immolated in the blaze and two were captured, but the remaining twenty-six blacks and nine whites escaped in the darkness and confusion.<sup>16</sup>

Having routed the Ethiopians and chased them from the river, the minute battalion returned to its original position across the branch that same day. No sooner had they left than a British force of about eighty, mostly Ethiopians, arrived at the landing and set up camp in practically the same spot as before. On the night of December 6, the patriots attacked again, this time with a force of one hundred and fifty regulars. The attackers were discovered by four men guarding a cart coming from Norfolk, who immediately opened fire and alerted the loyalist garrison. During the brief battle, the Ethiopians suffered six casualties (three dead and three captured, two of them wounded, one mortally) while wounding only one patriot.<sup>17</sup>

What became of the routed Ethiopians is unclear. No evidence exists to determine exactly where the survivors of the rout fled, but apparently they did not return to the fort. When Captain Samuel Leslie, commander of the Fourteenth, arrived at Fort Murray on the morning of December 9

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a party composed exclusively of Ethiopians, so it is not unreasonable to assume that black troops would be employed in a similar situation here.

<sup>16</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 4 and 5, 1775, RCHP, 1:106-7, 110-11; Scott to His Friend, December 5, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:183.

<sup>17</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 7, 1775, RCHP, 1:114.

with plans to deploy this group of Ethiopians, he found them absent and their whereabouts unknown. It seems likely that many if not all of the survivors deserted and returned to their former masters.<sup>18</sup>

The information divulged by the first two Ethiopians to be captured further indicates that the unit was poorly prepared for the military duties to which its members were assigned. George, former bondsman of Samuel Donaldson of Suffolk, told his captors that blacks were not issued muskets and cartridges until they were dispatched to Fort Murray. Ned, ex-slave of Nathaniel Newton of Kemp's Landing, corroborated George's story. The information given by the two captives also suggests that the Ethiopian Regiment was not formally organized. George left Norfolk for Fort Murray on December 4 in a group of fifty-five blacks and two whites, while Ned did likewise in a group of about twenty blacks and three whites. The two men ended up together at the abandoned ferry as part of a group of thirty blacks and nine whites. Since the typical company of both the British and patriot armies consisted of about fifty men and about a dozen commissioned and non-commissioned officers, the first two groups could have been part of an augmented company that was a little short on officers. However, the deployment at the ferry implies that one's final assignment took place at Fort Murray. Perhaps the white officers evaluated in some way the combat skills of each Ethiopian before deciding to dispatch him to the ferry or keep him at the fort. In any case, it seems clear that the Ethiopians were organized much more loosely than were their British or patriot counterparts.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 13, 1775, Davies, 12:60.

<sup>19</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 5, 1775, RCHP, 1:112-13; "Examination of Negro George," December 5, 1775, Scribner, 5:5859; "Examination of Negro Ned," December 5, 1775, Scribner, 5:59.

Despite their failure to hold the approach at the abandoned ferry, the Ethiopian defenders at Fort Murray continued to stymie the patriot advance on Norfolk. The little barricade provided sufficient cover for the blacks and their British and Tory allies, and the rebels could not approach it without being shot to shreds. Without artillery with which to batter down the fort's walls, the patriots would remain stuck in their tracks, and the Virginians had none. Then word arrived from North Carolina that several hundred troops under the command of Colonel Robert Howe were advancing on Great Bridge, and they were bringing cannon. The six pieces were worthless--their barrels were honeycombed, they lacked powder, and the accessories required to load and fire them were missing--but none of the commanders at Great Bridge knew any of that. When a slave boy ran away from Major Thomas Marshall, an officer under Colonel Scott, and informed Dunmore of the impending arrival of the artillery, the governor realized that he could not afford to sit still while the patriots prepared to turn his namesake into a pile of toothpicks.<sup>20</sup>

Determined to "risk something to save [the fort]," Dunmore dispatched Leslie after dark on December 8 with the remaining regulars and a daring plan. Upon arriving at the fort, the captain was to order two companies of Ethiopians to outflank the patriots under cover of night and assault the rebel rear at daybreak. When the patriots counterattacked the black troops in force, presumably reducing their numbers at the breastworks on the causeway in the process, the British regulars would quick-march across the bridge, break

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<sup>20</sup>Leslie to Gage, December 1, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:349; Woodford to Pendleton, December 10, 1775, RCHP, 1:116; Woodford to Virginia Convention, December 10, 1775, Ibid., 1:119-20.

through the patriot defenses, and rout the rebels as they had done so many times in previous months.<sup>21</sup>

The plan was as bold as it was unworkable. It overlooked the extreme difficulty the Ethiopians would encounter in outflanking their enemies. Leslie did not arrive at the fort until three in the morning, leaving only a few hours for the blacks to complete their maneuver. The only river crossings were heavily defended by patriots, and the Ethiopians would have had just as difficult a time fording the Elizabeth as the patriots had in the preceding days. The plan also suggests that neither Dunmore nor Leslie had a very clear idea of the number or disposition of their black troops. Dunmore knew of the first rout of the Ethiopians, but was apparently unaware of the second. He also seemed to think that the black cohort dispatched to guard the abandoned ferry after the first rout constituted the entire number of Ethiopians with any modicum of military training whatsoever. Apparently Leslie concurred in this opinion. When he arrived at the fort he learned that the initial defenders of the ferry had been reinforced with the "trained" Ethiopians, who were now no longer in the service of His Majesty. Despite the presence at the fort of about two hundred other blacks, Leslie determined to dispense with the diversion and rely solely on the frontal assault to gain the victory.<sup>22</sup>

As a professional soldier, Leslie surely held a poor opinion of both the Ethiopians and the patriot troops. Having watched his outnumbered regulars sweep the militiamen from the field in the raids of October and November, often without firing a shot, he must have held no doubts that his crack fighters would break through the barricade on the

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<sup>21</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 6 and 13, 1775, Davies, 12:60.

<sup>22</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 9, 1775, RCHP, 1:115; Dunmore to Dartmouth, December 13, 1775, Davies, 12:60.

causeway with little difficulty. If so, he was wrong. At dawn on December 9, the occupants of Fort Murray spilled out of the stockade and prepared to attack. Including Ethiopians, regulars, and white volunteers, they numbered five hundred. As the patriots watched in amazement, the British grenadiers marched in formation over the bridge and down the causeway. The remainder of the force, including the Ethiopians, halted at the edge of the causeway and awaited the outcome of the grenadiers' attack. Within minutes it was all over. The patriots quickly took up position behind the barricade and mowed down the hapless attackers. Over forty dead and wounded British soldiers lay sprawled on the causeway while the auxiliaries retreated to the shelter of the fort. Both sides eyed one another warily across the Elizabeth until sundown, the British too bloodied to do much else and the patriots too leery to venture out upon the bridge. Finally, under cover of night, the Ethiopians, Tories, and the remainder of the Fourteenth retreated to the safety of Norfolk. The next morning, after realizing that their enemies had fled, the patriots took possession of Fort Murray.<sup>23</sup>

The Ethiopians did not fare well after the defeat. Two of their members, James Anderson and Jonathan Hancock's Caesar, were left behind at the fort. Perhaps the severity of their wounds (Anderson had a shattered bone in his forearm and Caesar had been shot six times in the thigh) prevented them from being evacuated. Upon arriving in Norfolk, the rest of the black troops found themselves in the midst of chaos. The fortifications which the Ethiopians had dug with such pains were abandoned, with no thought given to manning them in defense of the town. Instead, Dunmore prepared to

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<sup>23</sup>Leslie to Gage, November 1 and 26, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 3:1716-17; Woodford to Pendleton, December 9, 1775, RCHP, 1:115.

repair to sea, as he had in June, with the remnants of his little army. Sensing their defenselessness, the citizens of Norfolk panicked, unsure of how the conquering patriots would treat them once they took possession of the town. Of even greater concern to them were the three hundred ex-slaves, many of them armed, who now freely roamed the streets of town. Convinced that the eve of Armageddon was upon them, the loyalists of Norfolk hastily packed what few belongings they could and fled.<sup>24</sup>

Surrounded on land by the approaching patriots, the refugees crammed themselves aboard every available vessel that appeared seaworthy and took to the safety of the Elizabeth River. One can only imagine the mad scramble that must have ensued at dockside. By the time all the pushing and shoving was over, only half of the three hundred Ethiopians had managed to secure a place on board. The rest had been disarmed by Dunmore and left stranded on shore. For these abandoned soldiers, their thoughts fogged with a sickening sense of dread at their uncertain fate at the hands of vengeful patriots, the baleful prediction of an unidentified Tory surely seemed about to come true: "I am extremely sorry that he has promised freedom to their slaves, as without serving his cause it may subject many of these poor wretches to the loss of life and most severe punishment."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Dr. William Browne to Woodford, December 10, 1775, Scribner, 5:103; Proceedings of the Virginia Committee of Safety, February 7, 1776, Scribner, 6:69; examination of Norfolk inhabitants, in three unidentified hands, no date, Scribner, 5:115-16. Because he had a surname, Anderson may have been a free black, although no other evidence exists to confirm that he was.

<sup>25</sup>Examination of Norfolk Inhabitants, Scribner, 5:115-16; Matthew Tilghman to John Hancock, January 5, 1776, Scribner, 5:288-89; Scott to Southall, December 12, 1775, Force, 4th ser., 4:245; Letter from a Virginia Tory, November 16, 1775, RCHP, 1:100-1. One of the anonymous authors of the

Miraculously, the Virginia Convention itself now came to the aid of these unfortunate wretches. On December 14, the Convention finally responded to Dunmore's proclamation. It declared that runaways caught bearing arms would be "subject to such punishment as shall hereafter be directed by the general convention," and hinted that said punishment would be execution without benefit of clergy. However, any runaway who left Dunmore and returned to his master by Christmas would be pardoned and left unpunished for his treasonous acts so long as he took up arms no more. Clearly, this was the salvation that these abandoned Ethiopians had no doubt prayed for. Having taken their best shot at gaining freedom and failed, virtually all of them returned home to their former masters and took up their lives as they had left them.<sup>26</sup>

For many of the white residents of Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, it was as if the pardon had unleashed the minions of hell upon them, and they petitioned the Convention to reconsider. The repatriated slaves constituted a grave danger to the tranquility of every plantation and farm to which they returned, claimed these residents, and they begged the Convention to rescind its proclamation and remove these troublemakers "to some of the West India islands, or elsewhere." For the time being, the Convention, certain that these petitioners entertained strong loyalist sympathies, ignored their pleas.<sup>27</sup>

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"examination" reckoned the Ethiopians to number three hundred immediately following the rout at Great Bridge, while the patriot Tilghman passed along Lt. Col. Thomas Elliott's estimate of one hundred and fifty Ethiopians aboard the flotilla three weeks later.

<sup>26</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, December 14, 1775, Scribner, 5:139; Virginia Committee of Safety to Maryland Provincial Convention, December 29, 1775, Scribner, 5:277.

<sup>27</sup>Petition of Inhabitants of Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties to the Virginia Convention, January 8, 1776, Scribner, 5:363.

Thinking that Norfolk was now firmly under their control, the patriots turned their attention to their prisoners of war, eleven of whom belonged to the Ethiopian Regiment. In fact, Woodford and his officers had been debating the question of how to treat captured runaways since December 5. In addition to George and Ned, the patriots at that time held three other runaways: Charles, claimed by Mr. Montgomery of Portsmouth; Will, claimed by George Corley of Blackwater in Norfolk County; and Tom, a runaway from North Carolina who had been hiding in the vicinity for the last two years.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the officers wanted to execute all black captives taken while in arms "according to the rules of war" as an example to deter other slaves from joining Dunmore, an action which Woodford's instructions from the Virginia Committee of Safety obliged him to take. But the patriot colonel declined to do so, despite the urgings of his subordinates, because he knew that the Virginia Convention was working on a counter-proclamation regarding the colony's slaves and he did not wish to undermine its effectiveness. One week later, Woodford still had not heard from the Convention, and so he ordered that each Ethiopian be handcuffed to a white prisoner and remain shackled that way until the Convention reached a decision. Two days later, that decision was made known in the counter-proclamation. The Convention determined that all captured slaves would be put to work in the colony's lead mine in Fincastle County, but until arrangements could be made to transport them, they would be incarcerated in the Williamsburg public jail.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Virginia Gazette (Purdie), January 6, 1776; Woodford to Pendleton, December 5, 12, and 17, 1775, RCHP, 1:110, 122, 133.

<sup>29</sup>Woodford to Pendleton, December 5, 12, and 17, 1775, RCHP, 1:110, 122, 133; Virginia Committee of Safety to Woodford, October 24, 1775, Scribner, 5:271; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, December 14, 1775, Scribner, 5:140.

The press of more important matters prevented Woodford from complying with the Convention's directive, and so the eleven captured Ethiopians did not arrive in Williamsburg until the morning of January 6, 1776. Part of the delay resulted from Woodford's attempt to exchange his Ethiopian prisoners for patriots held captive by the British. The Convention's orders implied that slaves were not to be exchanged, but the colonel attempted to do so anyway. By now the number of Ethiopian prisoners stood at twenty-seven, the patriots having captured an additional sixteen blacks at sea.

Commanded by Captain John Collett, the only white person in their company, they were sailing to the Eastern Shore to pick up provisions for the loyalist flotilla when they lost their bearings in a blizzard on December 22 and were taken prisoner. After much hemming and hawing, John Hunter, the loyalist handling the exchange of prisoners for Dunmore, refused to accept the ex-slaves and instead advised Woodford to sell them.<sup>30</sup>

Hunter's suggestion found favor with a number of the Convention's delegates. On January 17, they convinced the Convention to nullify its earlier decision and decree instead that those black captives "who have been active under Lord Dunmore, or have borne arms in his service," be sold out of the colony. Specifically, the Convention ordered the Committee of Safety to appraise all "active" prisoners and sell them to either "the foreign West India islands, or the Bay of Honduras." Proceeds from the sales were to be forwarded to

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<sup>30</sup>Virginia Gazette (Purdie), December 15, 1775 and January 6, 1776; Woodford to Pendleton, December 30, 1775, RCHP, 1:146; Patrick Henry to Pendleton, December 23, 1775, Scribner, 5:204, 227. According to E.M. Sanchez-Saavedra, A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations in the American Revolution (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1978), most of the Ethiopians were similarly employed as food-fetchers (p. 186), but this supposition is obviously incorrect.

the colony's treasurer who, after deducting the appropriate expenses, would give the remainder to the slaves' former owners "provided they are not unfriendly to American liberty." Along with these instructions, the Convention gave the Committee of Safety a list of suspected former Ethiopians who were affected by this decree.<sup>31</sup>

The list resulted from interrogations carried out in the Williamsburg lock-up by Henry King. King interviewed each of the jail's forty-one black prisoners to determine the nature of their involvement, if any, with Dunmore. King concluded from these interviews that twenty-nine of the prisoners had been "active," five had been "not active," and seven were runaways who had been captured at Point Comfort in Elizabeth City County but had nothing to do with Dunmore.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the Convention's decree, only nine Ethiopians were actually deported. They were loaded onto a ship bound for Antigua in early 1776, but the proceeds from their sale never returned to Virginia. Their vessel was captured by a British warship, and the nine unfortunates were offered for public sale by order of a British admiralty court in the West Indies. Once again, the Convention decided to send the

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<sup>31</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, January 17, 1776, Scribner, 5:423.

<sup>32</sup>Henry King's Report to the Virginia Convention, January 17, 1776, Scribner, 5:423. The names of the forty-one appear in Table 1. According to Frey, on January 17 the Convention ordered the sale of thirty-two blacks ("Between Slavery and Freedom," p. 385). The Convention ordered that the twelve slaves adjudged "not active" be returned to their masters. Eleven of the "active" slaves were captured in battle and sixteen were taken at sea. The twenty-eighth, Joseph Selden's Tom, ran away at age nineteen from his master in Elizabeth City County and joined Dunmore in the summer of 1775. He was captured when the tender he was aboard ran aground at Hampton in October, so technically Tom was never a member of the Ethiopian Regiment. The circumstances surrounding the capture of the twenty-ninth "active" slave are unknown.

captured Ethiopians to Fincastle. Hancock's Caesar, a captive who was severely wounded at Great Bridge, had been ordered to the lead mines in early February before word of the deportees' fate reached the colony, probably because his injured leg greatly diminished his value. The day after determining Caesar's fate, the Committee of Safety appraised Andrew Sprowle's Will and Hezekiah Holden's Dick as if they had been active with Dunmore, probably in preparation for their deportation. But after receiving the bad news from Antigua, the Committee dispatched the next nine Ethiopians to Fincastle instead.<sup>33</sup>

The departure of these nine prisoners left eleven Ethiopians still in jail, where they languished until mid-May. On May 8, the Convention entertained two proposals for privately employing the black prisoners of war. John Ballendine and John Reveley requested that they be allowed to work the captives in three of their enterprises in the Richmond area. These projects included building a canal from Westham to Richmond along the James River, extracting iron from a mine below the Seven Islands and a mile inland from the James, and mining coal. Their petition was rejected by the Convention on May 16. Two days later, the Convention approved a similar proposal from Charles Lynch of New London to use the slaves in his saltpetre works in Bedford County. Lynch succeeded where Ballendine and Reveley failed probably because Bedford, like Fincastle and unlike Richmond, was far removed from the center of Virginia civilization and the bulk of its slave population. The Convention stipulated that any captives not needed by Lynch be sent to the lead mines, and that the

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<sup>33</sup>Deposition of John Hunter, November 14, 1785, Scribner, 5:426; Proceedings of the Virginia Committee of Safety, February 7, February 8, and April 3, 1776, Scribner, 6:69, 76, 317.

militias of the counties through which they passed en route provide the necessary guard.<sup>34</sup>

Ten of the eleven may or may not have ended up in Lynch's custody, but one surely did not. Boush's Harry died in jail, as did at least three other blacks with tenuous connections to the Ethiopians. The deaths prompted an investigation of conditions in the Williamsburg lock-up, and the findings were presented to the Convention on June 7. Because the jail was "badly planned and situated for the purpose of admitting a free air," and because the large number of prisoners of war confined in the jail was far more than the tiny cellblock was intended to hold, all prisoners, white and black, suffered from lack of fresh air. "An offensive smell" permeated each of the rooms, and the cell in which the Ethiopians were confined "abound[ed] with filth." Given these conditions, a sentence of shoveling lead or making saltpetre must have seemed like a reprieve.<sup>35</sup>

The events of the last six weeks of 1775 brought about many changes in the lives of those ex-slaves who joined up with the Ethiopian Regiment. Some had died in battle. Others were headed for jail and an uncertain punishment, some fearing a slow death, some perhaps wishing for a swift one. Many had returned to their masters, their dreams of freedom shattered even if they were none the worse for the effort. Those who remained at large from their former owners sat

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<sup>34</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 8, May 16, and May 18, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:1514, 1525-27.

<sup>35</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 9, May 27, and June 7, 1776, Scribner, 7:78, 270, 276, 389. Mercury and an unnamed male, both the property of Samuel Boush, were suspected of having joined Dunmore in December 1775, but died before their trials. Bennett Tomkins' Amy was convicted of theft and died before her release. Amy had run away in November 1775 with Rachel, Ned, and Sam, also slaves of Tomkins. Ned and Sam were members of the Point Comfort Seven.

huddled aboard the loyalist flotilla, hungry, thirsty, and cold. Despite their deprivations, the runaways at sea still hoped that they might someday live free and in peace, and that the means to achieve this dream still lay within their grasp. A few of them would someday realize their dream, but most hoped in vain. In both cases, the pursuit of heaven-sent liberty was about to lead them on an odyssey through hell.

CHAPTER THREE:  
OR GIVE ME DEATH

One normally associates hell with heat, especially the kind generated by a furious blaze. In time, the Ethiopians would become frighteningly intimate with such heat, but as 1776 dawned their lot was anything but warm. The one hundred and fifty blacks who had managed to find refuge aboard the loyalist flotilla shivered desperately in their inadequate rags while frigid winter sea winds blasted them from the stormy Atlantic. After enduring the mind-numbing cold for almost three weeks, many of the runaways received a brief respite when Dunmore sent them ashore on New Year's Day to heat up the town of Norfolk.

Certainly the governor did not grant shore leave so that the Ethiopians could drive the chill from their cold bodies. Rather, several warehouses along the lower wharves on the Elizabeth River sheltered patriot snipers who used the cover to harass the flotilla, and his lordship intended to stop this deadly annoyance. On January 1 and 2, small parties of Ethiopians accompanied by whites landed in the hour before sundown and, before they were repulsed, set fire to these wooden structures. The arsonists torched the warehouses so effectively that the blazes quickly leapt into the town proper. By the morning of January 3, a great deal of Norfolk town had burned to the ground. On January 21, the parties returned to finish off some warehouses near Town Point Wharf that somehow survived the earlier conflagration. This time the patriot "water guards" were reinforced in time, and the raiders suffered heavy casualties. Two of the dead were Ethiopians, and the patriots "supposed[d] many others were killed and wounded that were carried off in their boats."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, January 4, 1776, Davies, 12:62; Howe and Woodford to Pendleton, January 1, 2, and 21, 1776, RCHP, 1:147, 149, 154.

The casualties sustained during these raids did not deter the loyalists from carrying out more, for they now found themselves in need of almost every sort of provision. In late January, ten men, four of them black, landed at Mr. Narsworthy's in Isle of Wight County to steal sheep. One Ethiopian, perhaps the same fellow from Kemp's Landing, was dressed "in the uniform of the Fourteenth Regiment." The patriot guard arrived quickly on the scene, captured the black in regimental dress, and drove off the others. In early February, undoubtedly motivated by the granddaddy of all nicotine fits, "a number of black-and-white people from the men of war" came ashore to steal tobacco from perhaps the last remaining warehouse in Norfolk. In exchange for five hogsheads of homegrown weed, the raiders traded six dead, four of them Ethiopians.<sup>2</sup>

These pyro- and kleptomaniacal forays provided the only relief from the stultifying boredom of life aboard a small boat going nowhere. Indeed, living conditions for the sea-borne Ethiopians were worse than for their fellows in jail. When the loyalists took to the water, Dunmore made sure the regulars, the marines, the members of the Queen's Own, and the well-to-do white families found space on board the four Royal Navy ships of war, six or seven tenders, and about forty or so brigantines, snows, schooners, sloops, and ships. A few of the Ethiopians were put to work as "scullions etc. on board the fleet," thereby earning a decent berth, but the rest were crammed aboard "small craft ... vessels that are not fit to go to sea." These inadequate quarters took their toll immediately. While many of the white loyalists had packed a few belongings before fleeing Norfolk, the blacks carried on board only the garments on their backs. Lack of

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), February 3 and 10, 1776; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), February 9, 1776.

proper shelter and clothing weakened the systems of the black loyalists to the point that their susceptibility to disease made them most vulnerable to a horrifying turn of events. "Jail fever" broke out in the fleet as soon as it set sail, then zeroed in on the Ethiopians as if they wore bulls-eyes on their backs.<sup>3</sup>

In all likelihood, the fever was epidemic typhus, an infectious disease that thrives in conditions such as those on board a crowded, unsanitary boat. The disease, spread by body lice, tormented its victims with severe headaches, back pain, and absolute exhaustion. Temperatures rose quickly to as high as 105° F, and stayed there for days. Pulses became rapid and weak. Tongues, covered with a whitish fur, began to tremble and shake, and some rolled up like a ball in the back of the mouth. Pupils contracted and the mucous membranes in the eyes became swollen with blood. Twitching muscles, constipation, stupor, and delirium set in. Some victims contracted pneumonia in their weakened state and died. Others succumbed to kidney failure. Still others fell into a coma and slipped away. The lucky ones endured the hellish symptoms for as much as two weeks before the fever broke. "A great many very fine fellows" were not so lucky. One patriot who had been a prisoner aboard the flotilla claimed that seventy-five blacks died during the first week at sea. Alexander Purdie, publisher of the Virginia Gazette, reported that, by early March, the number of Ethiopians who had died of "jail distemper" was almost one hundred and fifty. With

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<sup>3</sup>List of Ships in Dunmore's Fleet to the Maryland Council of Safety, July 10, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:152-53; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 22, 1776; Dunmore to Lord George Germain, Secretary for the Colonies, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:101; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), June 15, 1776.

little ceremony, most of the dead carcasses were "tumbled into the deep, to regale the sharks."<sup>4</sup>

Dunmore's medical advisors correctly concluded that the contagion was due to overcrowded conditions and lack of proper clothing. The prison-like accommodations allowed the fever-laden lice to jump easily from victim to victim. When the half-frozen living claimed the bug-infested garments of the dead, they unknowingly improved the odds that they, too, would succumb to the typhus. Dunmore took what steps he could to help control the raging epidemic. He separated the sick from the well and kept the two groups as isolated from one another as possible. He bought "a large quantity of oznaburgs [coarse cotton garments frequently worn by slaves]" to provide better clothing for his army. Most importantly, in early February he established himself on land. Tucker's Mill Point, on the west bank of the Elizabeth River and just to the north of Portsmouth, became the new home for the loyalist refugees, and it was here that the governor established "pretty good barracks for our Ethiopian corps."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Dunmore to Germain, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:101; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 8, 1776; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), June 15, 1776; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 8, 1776. For the connection between jail fever and epidemic typhus, see Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990 ed., s.v. "Infectious Diseases," by Andrew B. Christie, Ralph D. Feigin, and Renu Garg, 21:546; for a complete description of the disease, see Clayton L. Thomas, ed., Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary, Twelfth Ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co. 1973), pp. T-84 and T-85.

<sup>5</sup>Dunmore to Germain, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:101. Dunmore seemed to think that the outbreak of fever among his blacks was an unlucky blow, as it surely was. However, disease was a part of warfare in the eighteenth century, and the governor's patriot foes experienced their share of it as well. In late March and early April, 1776, smallpox broke out in Yorktown amongst the patriots stationed there. At the same time, the troops of the Second Virginia Regiment in Suffolk, Kemp's Landing, and Great Bridge were hit hard with a rash of

Tucker's Mill was an excellent choice for a land base. It was, as one patriot put it, "the most advantageous post the enemy can possess in Virginia for prosecuting their piratical war." Just across the river from Norfolk, it afforded easy access to Hampton Roads and commanded all three branches of the Elizabeth. The mill itself stood on a slight rise between the Western Branch to the north and a small creek to the south. An old open field stretched out for half a mile to the west of the mill, and was easily commanded by the cannon on the men-of-war. To make the position stronger, the loyalists enclosed about four acres within an entrenchment which consisted of a ditch and a breastwork. The ditch was eight to ten feet wide and eight or nine feet deep, and ran for about three hundred yards. The "cannonproof" breastwork was about six feet high and eight to ten feet thick, and anchored on each end by a cove. Those portions of the breastwork that might be forded were further protected by staked rails. Four or five cannon were mounted behind the fortification, which protected the mill, four ovens for baking bread, three or four pumps for drawing up fresh water, a hospital, and a parade ground where the Ethiopians drilled. How much of the construction work was performed by the Ethiopians is not known. More than half of the blacks who had evacuated Norfolk in mid-December were now dead, and the rest were either dying or slowly recuperating. Surely as many Ethiopians as could took part in the digging, but in all

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illness resulting from the lack of blankets and bedding as well as rampant uncleanness. Meanwhile, the patriots in Hampton were dealing with an outbreak of the mumps (Gen. Charles Lee to Captain Grier, April 8, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:392; Dr. Alexander Skinner to Lee, April 11, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:413; James Hendricks to Lee, April 18, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:432.

likelihood much of the work was done by their healthier white comrades.<sup>6</sup>

Dunmore probably set up house at Tucker's Mill for a reason more important to him than restoring the health of his black soldiers. The governor believed that only reinforcements from the British Army would make his efforts to re-establish royal authority in the colony fruitful. Hoping for such reinforcements from General Howe at any moment, his lordship may have built the marvelous little base in the superb location as a station, not for his own adventures, but for those of the "Southern Expedition" when it arrived from North Carolina. In any event, Dunmore still did not see his Ethiopians as a primary tool with which to subdue the patriots of Virginia, but instead regarded them as only a temporary expedient towards that end. In fact, the governor frequently risked losing his black recruits by employing them as bearers of flags of truce to the patriots, usually on missions seeking fresh water and provisions. So disgusted did the Virginia Convention become with this use of its constituents' former property that it resolved to take such bearers into custody without regard for their flags.<sup>7</sup>

Dunmore's dismissal of the military usefulness of his Ethiopians was echoed in the patriot press. Purdie, whose

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<sup>6</sup>Col. Adam Stephen to Pendleton, May 25, 1776, Scribner, 7:265; Lt. Col. Frank Eppes to Lee, March 31 and April 6, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:365-66, 384-86; Major Josiah Parker to Lee, April 28, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:459; Dunmore to Germain, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:102.

<sup>7</sup>Dunmore to Dartmouth, January 4, 1776, Davies, 12:66; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 15, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:1524. Dunmore had been begging for Howe's direct assistance since October 1775, when he wrote the general that "I could supply your army and navy with every necessary of life, and that in the greatest abundance" (Dunmore to Howe, October 28, 1775, in Virginia Gazette (Purdie), January 26, 1776). A typical flag mission from Dunmore is reported in Colonel Andrew Lewis to Lee, May 27, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:42.

newspaper was filled with anti-imperialist vitriolic, flavored his description of an Ethiopian drill with an extra measure of racial condescension:

Lord Dunmore's Royal Regiment of Black Fusileers, [when called upon] to perform the military exercise, and to comply with their native warlike genius, instead of the drowsy drum and fife, will be gratified with the use of the sprightly and enlivening barrafoo, an instrument peculiarly adapted to the martial tune of "Hunger Niger, parch'd corn," and which from thence forward is to be styled--the Blackbird March.

Purdie's dismissal of the fighting abilities of the Ethiopians was widely shared by the patriot community, even if his talents as a writer were not.<sup>8</sup>

Slaves who thirsted for freedom paid no mind to either white hostility or Dunmore's indifference. Despite the governor's retirement from land, blacks continued to run and sail to him. In early February, seven runaways broke out of the Northampton County jail, commandeered a small boat, and sailed off across the Chesapeake Bay. Two slaves belonging to John Smith of Norfolk ran away to join the Ethiopians. One of William Smith's slaves was shot and killed by patriot troops when he refused to surrender. Two slaves sailing to the governor mistook a patriot vessel for a Royal Navy tender and instead of finding freedom went to jail. Runaways "stole the boats lying in the rivers and creeks, and made their escape to Lord Dunmore in the night." So many slaves did so that by April the Ethiopian Regiment numbered between two and three hundred, despite the murderous effects of the typhus epidemic. In addition to the black troops, his lordship had at his disposal about one hundred regulars, sixty marines,

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<sup>8</sup>Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 22, 1776.

and one hundred and fifty of the Queen's Own, so that the Ethiopians now constituted about half of the loyalist army.<sup>9</sup>

The patriots tried to stop the flow of slaves to Dunmore in two ways. Soldiers were dispatched to "examine the different landings and coves" of the Nansemond and Chuckatuck rivers, which flowed into the James west of Tucker's Mill, and secure all the boats they could find. The boats were placed in the care of either the "lower guard" in the Suffolk area or the owners of the boats, who were asked to remove and secrete them. Several owners refused to cooperate, and their boats were destroyed by the patriot troops. The other tactic was to restrict the slaves' access to the water. General Charles Lee of the Continental Army ordered that all blacks in Portsmouth "capable of bearing arms [were] to be secured immediately and sent up to Suffolk." On April 10, the Virginia Convention ordered that all male slaves of thirteen years and older belonging to either suspected loyalists or to everyone living in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties be delivered to any patriot officer in the two counties "to be conveyed to some place off navigation."<sup>10</sup>

Despite these measures, slaves were still running to Dunmore and freedom in early May, and not just in groups of two or three. On April 14, as a result of the order to

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<sup>9</sup>Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 9 and 28, 1776, Scribner, 7:79 and Force, 4th ser., 6:1540; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), February 10 and April 13, 1776; Deposition of William Barry, June 11, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:811. Eppes, the local patriot commander, calculated that Dunmore had only forty regulars and one hundred "Tory volunteers," but these figures are obviously too low in light of the numbers at the governor's disposal several months later (Eppes to Lee, March 31, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:365).

<sup>10</sup>Lt. Col. Read to Lee, April 7, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:390; Lee to Col. Muhlenberg, April 23, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:445; Virginia Convention to Inhabitants of Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties and Suspected Loyalists, April 10, 1776, Scribner, 6:370.

remove the slaves to the interior, all eighty-seven of John Willoughby's slaves left his plantation in Norfolk County and fled to Dunmore. Of the eighty-seven, only sixteen were adult males. The rest of the group was composed of twenty-one women, twenty-three girls, and twenty-seven boys.<sup>11</sup>

This massive defection suggests three interesting possibilities. The first is that a significant number of slaves ran to Dunmore in large groups rather than ones and twos. We know of several groups of five or more who tried to make it to the governor, but these groups were almost always captured. As for those runaways who successfully joined Dunmore, the possibility is difficult to prove or disprove because many of them shared the same owner-surnames. For example, seven slaves ran from owners named "Thorowgood" and five from owners named "Keeling." In Princess Anne County alone, there were eight slave-owning Thorowgoods and seven slave-owning Keelings. Considering that two of the Thorowgoods and three of the Keelings owned at least fourteen slaves each, determining the size of a group of runaways becomes virtually impossible. However, it seems safe to say that, the Willoughby slaves excepted, those runaways who traveled in small groups had the greater odds of success.<sup>12</sup>

The second possibility is that some of the musket-toting Ethiopians were women. After all, Dunmore's proclamation was not gender specific; it stipulated only that slave recruits be "able-bodied." Eighteen of the twenty-one Willoughby

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<sup>11</sup>Woodford to Lee, May 2, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:462; Petition of John Willoughby to the Virginia House of Delegates, RCHP, 1:343. For a complete list of Willoughby's slaves, see Table 2 in the Appendix.

<sup>12</sup> For the list of Dunmore's black recruits, see Table 3 in the Appendix. For the list of owners' surnames, see Edward W. James, ed., "Land and Slave Owners, Princess Anne County, 1775," Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 3:1-7, 69-70, 100-1.

women were age thirty or younger, so most of them probably satisfied the lone criterion for enlistment. Certainly slave women would have been capable of the physical exertion demanded of a soldier, as they often worked in the fields alongside the males and did the same work. However, this scenario seems unlikely. British military pride, already wounded by the arming of slaves, almost surely rebelled at the arming of females. This conclusion is supported by a list of runaways compiled in Dunmore's camp in late May. The list identifies the members of two of the three Ethiopian companies, all of whom were male. Although it is certainly possible that an enterprising black woman disguised herself as a man in order to fight for her freedom, most if not all of the women were camp followers. The list indicates that, at least on board ship, they were segregated from the men, and they probably did the cooking, cleaning, and nursing for their own menfolk as well as for the white members of the loyalist army.<sup>13</sup>

The third possibility is that slaves ran to Dunmore as family units as well as individuals. On this point, there seems to be no doubt. Several examples exist of men and women running away together to his lordship, sometimes as a couple, sometimes in larger groups. At Gwynn's Island, one family, including father, mother, and children, joined the governor as a unit. Obviously, Willoughby's slaves joined Dunmore as a number of family units. All together, there are a possible thirty pairs of men and women that could have run

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<sup>13</sup>See Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix. A few women did fight in the American Revolution, but a great many more followed the armies, both Continental and British. For a more complete discussion of these two phenomena, see Walter H. Blumenthal, Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution (New York: Arno Press, 1974), especially pp. 69-70.

away to Dunmore as a couple, and one example of a mother-daughter pair.<sup>14</sup>

Whether by themselves or with their loved ones, slaves deserted their masters from much farther away than Suffolk or Norfolk. One of the more desperate was Robert Brent's house servant Charles. "A very shrewd sensible fellow, who can both read and write," and who had traveled extensively throughout Virginia and Maryland while serving his master, Charles ran away from Brent's estate in Stafford County on November 7, 1775. Brent thought his slave had taken off for Dunmore in the company of a white indentured servant and that the pair made it as far as Smith's Point in Northumberland County, where a Captain Kelly took them on board his oyster boat. At any rate, Charles was eventually recaptured and returned. On April 2, 1776, Charles tried again, this time accompanied by George Brent's Kitt, Thompson Mason's Charles, and John Ratliff's Harry, all of Stafford County. Around midnight, the four men crept aboard a small schooner in Aquia Harbor. Their efforts to cast off woke Ralph and John Grissoll, who had been sleeping in the forecastle. "Who's there?" called out one of the Grissolls. He was answered "Don't speak or the worse shall come to you!" When the hatch was finally opened, the Grissolls found their ship adrift in the middle of the Potomac River. The hijackers asked the two brothers to steer the schooner to Coon River, where they would then be allowed to leave on the ship's punt. The Grissolls agreed, but instead steered the vessel to the Maryland side, where the runaways were captured. As punishment for their crime, Brent's Charles and Kitt were ordered to be hanged. The other two were sentenced to have an ear cut off, be pilloried, and receive thirty-nine lashes. The Virginia Convention eventually overturned the local court's

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<sup>14</sup>See Table 4 in the Appendix.

decision and ordered the two condemned men to the lead mines.<sup>15</sup>

On April 23, a similarly bold attempt was made, this time from Northampton County on the Eastern Shore. Four runaways boarded a vessel in Hungar's Harbor at night and overwhelmed its two sleeping occupants. After cutting the cables, the four sailed into Chesapeake Bay headed towards Hampton Roads. The local militia gave chase in whale boats and caught the stolen craft only because it was sailing into the wind. The four runaways, Ned, James, Aaron, and Reuben, the property of Thomas Parramore and John Bowdoin Jr., were ordered executed by the local court. As with the Stafford runaways, the sentences of Ned, Reuben, and James were commuted by the Convention and the three runaways were sent instead to the lead mines.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, back at Tucker's Mill, the Ethiopians and their white confreres were enjoying the simple pleasures of life on dry land behind the safety of the entrenchment. The wells provided plenty of fresh water, the four acres afforded plenty of room to recuperate and exercise, and the residents of Portsmouth supplied them with provisions when they could. To supplement the largesse of the Portsmouth loyalists, Dunmore recruited a Tory merchant family. The Goodriches, led by father John, sons John Jr., William, and Bartlett, and son-in-law William Shedden, plied the rivers of Tidewater in

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<sup>15</sup>Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), November 23, 1775; Deposition of Ralph and John Grissoll, April 2, 1776, Proceedings of Stafford County Court, April 27, 1776, Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 28, 1776, Scribner, 6:305, 484-85, 7:284.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Parramore and John Bowdoin Jr. to the Virginia Committee of Safety, April 23, 1776, Scribner, 6:449; Proceedings of the Virginia Committee of Safety, April 29, 1776, Scribner, 6:455, 490; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 8, 1776, Scribner, 7:60. Aaron's fate is unknown.

five family-owned vessels to "seize ... everything that is water-borne that they can get at." When not raiding defenseless merchantmen, the Goodrich clan preyed on whatever waterside plantations they found unprotected. They "land[ed] only where they are not likely to meet with opposition and ha[d] orders to retire on board so soon as they see any force coming against them." Although the Goodriches were accompanied by a few regulars, their primary source of manpower was the Ethiopians. On April 21, the tender commanded by Bartlett Goodrich, with a crew of fourteen men, mostly blacks, captured a ship from New England unloading corn at Hobb's Hole. The tender and its prize were pursued by the patriots, and two days later the two forces tangled. After a battle that lasted several hours, the loyalist tender was forced to flee with the loss of four men. A few days later, Bartlett and his remaining ten crew members were captured and removed from action.<sup>17</sup>

The threat posed to the colony's commerce by the loyalists at Tucker's Mill made it imperative that the patriots do everything in their power to drive the loyalists back out to sea. Accordingly, two hundred troops were posted to the head of the Western Branch to prevent Dunmore's army from breaking out of their enclave and overrunning the countryside west of Portsmouth. In addition, the patriots made probing attacks against the defenders of the entrenchment to try to draw them out into the open where they would be easier to destroy. In

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<sup>17</sup>Eppes to Lee, April 6, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:384-85; Dunmore to Germain, March 30, 1776, Davies, 12:102; diary entries, April 22, April 23, and April 24, 1776, Jack P. Greene, ed., The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778 (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1987), 2:1021-26 *passim*; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), June 8, 1776. Carter's diary entry says "six or eight" of Goodrich's crew were killed in the battle, but if the before and after figures of fourteen and ten, respectively, are correct, then Carter overestimated.

early April, a patriot force of one hundred men arrived at daybreak and "kept an unsteady fire on [the defenders] at different times, which occasioned an almost constant discharge of artillery through the whole day." The defenders refused to fall for the patriot scheme and remained behind the dirt barricade. The result was a Mexican standoff. The patriots could not breach the defensive works of the defenders, nor could they hope to hold the fort if they did manage to capture it because of the cannon fire they would draw from the loyalist flotilla. Because of the siege, the Ethiopians and their allies could not venture out from behind the entrenchment. And so the two sides eyed each other, traded shots from time to time, and waited.<sup>18</sup>

On April 27, three hundred patriot troops attempted to put an end to the stalemate. They attacked the entrenchment in the morning and were repulsed by the defenders. Later that afternoon the patriots attacked again, with the same result. If the Ethiopians were manning the defenses during the attacks (the sources are not specific on race at this point), then they were firing their muskets with greater accuracy and defending their position much more ably than they had in December. Frustrated in their attempt to seize the barricade, the patriots next tried to set fire to the British ships protecting Tucker's Mill, and again they failed.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the ability of his troops to hold Tucker's Mill, Dunmore apparently felt that his forces were being strangulated slowly by the surrounding patriots. In fact, Woodford was preparing to send fire rafts into their fleet when the loyalists abandoned Tucker's Mill for a more secure position elsewhere. They dismantled their entrenchment, set fire to

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<sup>18</sup>Eppes to Lee, April 6, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:384-86; Lee to Muhlenberg and Eppes, April 11, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:411.

<sup>19</sup>Parker to Lee, April 28, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:458-59.

the buildings, and returned to the ships and boats. On May 23, the flotilla of over a hundred vessels began making its way to Gwynn's Island off the east coast of Gloucester County. The Royal Navy must have reconnoitered Gwynn's Island long before Dunmore determined to relocate there, for it offered the loyalist flotilla an even better base than Tucker's Mill. The 2300-acre island was almost deserted, serving as home to about a dozen poor families, two hundred head of cattle, and several hundred sheep. Not having enjoyed the savory taste of fresh meat for seven weeks, the loyalists found the herds particularly inviting. The island was separated from the mainland by a channel about a quarter-mile wide and too deep to wade except at low tide and then only at great risk. Nor was Gwynn's well-known; Colonel Andrew Lewis, the patriot commander in Gloucester, admitted to Lee, his superior, that he had never heard of it until Dunmore's force landed there.<sup>1</sup> And yet, five weeks before the loyalists took possession of Gwynn's, the Committee of Safety of Gloucester County begged Lee not to remove the Seventh Regiment from their county because they feared an attack by the governor owing to their fertile farmlands and because they were almost surrounded by water. Was the committee paranoid, or had British scouts let the cat out of the bag?<sup>20</sup>

In their wake, the loyalists left hundreds of their dead companions. The patriot scouts found evidence that the typhus epidemic had not ceased once the loyalists landed at Tucker's Mill, but continued to burn away at its helpless victims. Those fortunate enough to avoid the Scylla of the fever now had to dodge the Charybdis of smallpox, as that

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<sup>20</sup>Colonel Andrew Lewis to Lee, May 27, June 3, and August 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:42, 44, 52, 53, 213; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), May 25 and June 1, 1776; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), May 24, 1776; The Committee of Safety of Gloucester County to Lee, April 22, 1776, Lee Papers, 1:443.

horrid disease broke out amongst his lordship's white followers. "Three hundred fresh graves, some of them large enough to contain the carcasses of a corporal's command," were discovered behind the entrenchment. So concerned was the local patriot commander that his own troops might contract the fever that he ordered his men to stay away from the breastworks. How many of the dead bodies belonged to former Ethiopians is impossible to know, but surely at least half, or approximately two hundred, of the corpses were black.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these casualties, Dunmore still had over two hundred runaways in his command when he landed on Gwynn's Island on May 26, of whom about one hundred and twenty were capable of bearing arms. The remainder of the group was composed of sixty-four invalids convalescing on board the hospital brig Adonis, forty-eight women, an unknown number of children, and a five-man commissary detail, headed by Parker's Tony, which transported flour, rum, and beef from the flotilla to the runaways. The Ethiopians were formed into three companies, commanded respectively by Dunmore, Major Byrd, and Captain Mackay. His lordship's company was the largest, consisting of forty-four soldiers and five non-commissioned officers. Byrd's command included forty soldiers and one corporal, while Mackay officered thirty-six men.<sup>22</sup>

Accompanying the Ethiopians were about one hundred regulars, an equal number of marines, and about one hundred and fifty of the Queen's Own. The group immediately set

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<sup>21</sup>Stephen to Pendleton, May 25, 1776, Scribner, 7:265; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), May 25, 1776.

<sup>22</sup>"Morning Rounds of Lord Dunmore's Black Banditti," Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), August 31, 1776. For a complete list of the members of the three companies, as well as the names of the women, see Table 3 in the Appendix. The names of those on the hospital brig are not specified.

about fortifying their position on the island. They threw up an entrenchment across the narrow part of the island on the land side, which was manned primarily by the Ethiopians, and erected three artillery batteries and a stockade fort, all of which were "of excellent construction and considerable extent." Next they pitched tents, built grass huts, constructed ovens and windmills, and erected a hospital. The loyalists evidently planned to stay for a long time, an indication that Dunmore still hoped to be relieved by the Southern Expedition. Certainly the patriot commander thought so, as he commented that Gwynn's "would have been a convenient place for [Commodore] Sir Peter [Parker, the expedition's naval commander] ... to have mended his breeches in." Dunmore was not deluding himself that such relief might actually come about. Lord George Germain, Dartmouth's successor, advised Governor Robert Eden of Maryland to cooperate with Dunmore in helping the expedition if it came to Virginia after leaving North Carolina. Sir Peter himself thought it likely that "our next movement will be to Virginia."<sup>23</sup>

When the loyalists shifted their base from Hampton Roads to the Chesapeake, they gave new hope to the great many slaves living on the Eastern Shore and along the Potomac, Rappahannock and Piankatank rivers. Almost immediately, blacks began running to join their brothers and sisters on Gwynn's Island. On May 5, Robert Hart's Gabriel and Ben

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<sup>23</sup>Deposition of William Barry, June 11, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:811; "A Particular Account of the Attack and Rout of Lord Dunmore, with his Piratical Crew, from Gwynn's Island," Force, 5th ser., 1:150; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), June 1 and 15, 1776; John Page to Lee, July 12, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:133-34; Lewis to Lee, June 3 and 12, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:52-53, 64-65; Stephen to Lee, July 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:138; Germain to Eden, December 23, 1775, Scribner, 5:230; Parker to Philip Stephens, May 15, 1776, Davies, 12:140.

stole a horse and rode away from their master's place in Spotsylvania County. Although Ben had a wife in Hanover County, Hart suspected the pair were headed for Dunmore. George Slater's Phill ran away from the Eastern Shore heading for the governor but was captured. Christopher Calvert's Davy ran away to Dunmore but was caught, jailed, tried, and sent to the lead mines instead. Another group of Eastern Shore slaves stole a boat and left Accomac County to sail to Dunmore. John Bailey's Luke, Thomas Jacobs' Peter, and Edmund Bailey's Joe, Gabriel, and Joe Acum were captured and imprisoned for their efforts. Gabriel, being but a boy, was returned to his master, but the rest were ordered to be sent "up the country, and employed in some public works." Some who joined his lordship did so knowing in advance of the disease and deprivation which hounded the governor's army. When the flotilla landed at Gwynn's, three blacks who lived on the island sailed out and discussed local conditions with the British officers. When the three were invited to join the Ethiopians, all agreed, and one went back to fetch his wife and two children.<sup>24</sup>

In early June, two of Colonel Landon Carter's slaves ran away from his plantation at Bluff Point and were "reported to have gone off to Dunmore." On June 25, eight more of Carter's slaves and one belonging to his son followed the Bluff Pointers' example. They took a gun, a bag of bullets, and some powder, and left before dawn in a "petty auger," a dugout canoe rigged with a sail. At seven that morning a band of minutemen spotted them at Mosquito Point "going very fast on the Middlesex [County] shore." When the patriots opened

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<sup>24</sup>Deposition of William Barry, June 11, 1776, Force, 4th ser., 6:811; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), May 25, 1776; Proceedings of the Virginia Convention, May 29, June 2, 7, and 19, 1776, Scribner, 7:300, 550 and Force, 4th ser., 6:1552-53.

fire, the nine runaways landed the boat and escaped on foot.<sup>25</sup>

What happened to the nine remains a mystery. At first, Carter was told that Moses and many of the others were killed by the minutemen. Later he was informed that the slaves eluded this group of patriots, but shortly thereafter encountered a detachment of one hundred minutemen from King and Queen County, who reportedly killed Mulatto Peter and two others and captured the rest. Neither report satisfied the colonel, so on July 5 he dispatched his apprentice Billy Beale to find out the real story. Four days later, Beale returned with word that the men from King and Queen had not seen Carter's slaves, but had caught a number of "other people's Negroes" from their camp at the point between the Rappahannock and Piankatank rivers and within view of Gwynn's Island.<sup>26</sup>

About the same time, Carter heard from John Guthrie, a merchant in Richmond County and, according to Carter, "an egregious liar." Guthrie reported that some slaves who had run away from Gwynn's told him that Moses, his son's slave, was on the island, and if he could get away he would come home to his master. Beale reported that the King and Queen commander told him "the slaves were returning daily, most miserably and barbecued," and that a great many more wanted to get away from Gwynn's as soon as they could.<sup>27</sup>

Carter never did find out what happened to the runaways.

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<sup>25</sup>Diary entries, June 11, June 26, and June 29, 1776, Greene, 2:1049, 1051-52. Carter's slaves included Joe, Billy, Postillion John, Mulatto Peter, Tom, Panticove, Manuel, and Lancaster Sam. His son's slave was named Moses.

<sup>26</sup>Diary entries, June 29, July 3, and July 9, 1776, Greene, 2:1052, 1055.

<sup>27</sup>Diary entry, July 9, 1776, Greene, 2:1055.

In time, he would hear reports that five of them were in the Middlesex County jail, that Moses was seen alive and well in Philadelphia, that Moses had been captured and imprisoned in Philadelphia while trying to return to his master, that Moses had died of smallpox on Gwynn's, and that Moses had died of "contagious fever" at St. George's Island in the Potomac. So preoccupied with the fate of the nine were Carter and his family that one night both he and his daughter Judy dreamed about them. In the dream, Carter was awakened by one of the blacks, who "appeared most wretchedly meager and wan." The slave, in the throes of "great sorrow," told Carter how "all of them had been wounded by the minutemen, had hid themselves in a cave they had dug and had lived ever since on ... roots." The runaway begged Carter to arrange a pardon for them, "for he knew they should be hanged for what they had done." The dream convinced Carter that he would soon hear from the nine blacks. He was wrong.<sup>28</sup>

Despite all hopes to the contrary, life on Gwynn's Island proved to be no more hospitable for the loyalists than aboard the flotilla or at Tucker's Mill. The Ethiopians no longer died from jail fever alone. The smallpox epidemic which broke out among the whites at Tucker's Mill had spread to the blacks, in spite of their inoculation by the governor's medical personnel. Lewis reported that a battalion he had posted on the Gloucester mainland to prevent any "disaffected Negroes" from crossing to the island watched the corpses of dead Ethiopians wash up on the shore every day. The two fevers raged through the loyalist camp and weakened the little army to the point that it could no longer defend itself. On July 9, after an artillery barrage destroyed many of their tents and as a patriot amphibious force canoed from

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<sup>28</sup>Diary entries, July 15 and 25, 1776, February 24, 1777, Greene, 2:1057, 1064, 1084-85.

the mainland to attack them, the loyalists abandoned Gwynn's Island and sailed away into Chesapeake Bay. So deadly was the fire from the patriot artillery that many vessels slipped their cables to escape, and the flotilla was forced to leave "without water, or one biscuit aboard." Two Ethiopians deserted to the patriots, and several others were captured, apparently left behind in the mad dash to set sail.<sup>29</sup>

The patriots were horrified by what they found in the wake of the loyalist retreat. "Dead bodies, in a state of putrefaction, [were] strewed all the way from their battery to Cherry Point, about two miles in length," most with a spadeful of earth thrown over them. The near-dead, unable to speak, moaned and motioned as best they could for help. Some victims, dehydrated by the fevers that had wracked them for so long, lay by the water's edge, trying in vain to slake their thirst. Others made pitiable attempts "to crawl away from the intolerable stench of dead bodies lying by their sides." One baby, oblivious to the "shocking scene," was found sucking at the breast of its dead mother. The brush huts, "in their confusion, had got on fire," and many of the loyalists were burned alive before they could escape. One witness counted one hundred and thirty graves, "or rather holes loosely covered over with earth, many of them large enough to hold a corporal's guard." Between the burned and buried, close to five hundred loyalists, of whom probably half were Ethiopians, lay dead on Gwynn's Island in "a scene

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<sup>29</sup>Examination of James Cunningham, no date, Force, 5th ser., 1: 431-32; "A Particular Account," Force, 5th ser., 1:151; Stephen to Lee, July 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:137-38; Page to Lee, July 12, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:131-34; Lewis to Lee, June 3 and 12, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:52, 64-65.

of misery, distress, and cruelty [as] my eyes never beheld."<sup>30</sup>

After fleeing Gwynn's, the flotilla made its way to Maryland in search of a base where the ships could be repaired before making a run for New York. Meanwhile, some of the navy's tenders, while raiding cattle from plantations on the Nanticoke and Wicomico rivers of Maryland's Eastern Shore, "robbed the most wealthy man in [one] neighborhood of ... all his Negroes they could lay hands on." Altogether, the tenders returned to the main fleet with almost one hundred new recruits for his lordship's service, perhaps half of them black. After sailing north up the Bay for several days, the loyalists headed up the Potomac River. On July 15, they landed about fifteen miles upriver on St. George's Island in St. Mary's County, Maryland. While the fleet of seventy-two vessels, "divers of them small sharp-rigged sloops or boats," was in transit from Gwynn's, two boats containing five deserters, of whom two were black, made their way to the Maryland mainland where they were captured. The fact that all five had smallpox sent a alarm racing through the countryside, as many Marylanders believed that the five were "driven on shore by my lord ... to spread that horrid disease as much as possible."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>"A Particular Account," Force, 5th ser., 1:151; Lee to Pendleton, June 29, 1776, Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), July 20, 1776. Captain Andrew Snape Hamond, commander of the Royal Navy vessels accompanying Dunmore, wrote that despite "six to eight arrivals" daily of black recruits, the Ethiopian Regiment never grew larger than one hundred and fifty men. These arrivals, and corresponding deaths, amounted to about two hundred and fifty for the forty-day period from June 1 to July 9 (diary entry, June 10, 1776, "A.S. Hamond Diaries, 1775-1777," unpublished manuscript, Tracy W. McGregor Library, University of Virginia).

<sup>31</sup>Hamond diary entries, July 8 and 11, 1776; Jonathan Bell, Jonathan Polk, John Creighton, Joseph Forman, John Mitchell, Isaac Horsey, Levin Connaway, and Robert Houston to the

From St. George's, the loyalists also spread fear, as all the planters on both sides of the Potomac prepared as best they could to defend their holdings from the depredations of Dunmore's forces. Robert Carter called together all his slaves at Coles Point, one of his plantations in Westmoreland County, to dissuade them from running to the governor. He warned them that Dunmore would sell them to the West Indies if they deserted their master, then exacted their promise to remain at Coles Point. Should loyalist ships appear, the slaves were to grab up their tools, belongings, and families and hide in the woods until Carter sent for them. The stratagem worked; none of Carter's Coles Point slaves ran away to Dunmore.<sup>32</sup>

At St. George's, the flotilla split into two groups. One proceeded further up the Potomac while the other remained in anchorage at the island. This second group made no attempt to establish a permanent land base. Only the troops, consisting of one hundred Ethiopians as well as fifty regulars and one hundred and fifty of the Queen's Own, left

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Sussex County, Delaware, Council of Safety, July 5, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:1011; Col. Jordan to Maryland Council of Safety, July 15, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:342; Maryland Council of Safety to Delegates in Congress, July 19, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:434; Extract of a Letter from One of the Council of Safety at Annapolis to His Friend in Baltimore, July 15, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:341-42. Dunmore had been suspected of resorting to germ warfare before. The Virginia Gazette reported that, before the flotilla landed at Tucker's Mill Point, the governor had inoculated two blacks and sent them ashore "to spread the infection, but it was happily prevented" (Dixon and Hunter, June 15, 1776). Smallpox did break out amongst the Maryland troops under the command of Bennett Bracco at Port Tobacco. The man suspected of introducing the disease claimed to be a deserter from Dunmore, and the unit's doctor believed that the man had been inoculated.

<sup>32</sup>Louis Martin, Robert Carter of Nomini Hall: A Virginia Tobacco Planter of the Eighteenth Century (Charlottesville, VA: Dominion Books, 1945), 55-56.

the safety of the fleet. Rather than build fortifications as at Portsmouth and Gwynn's Island, they landed every morning, gathered firewood and collected drinking water from a well, and returned to the ships every evening. They also began dismasting and burning many of the smaller craft, in preparation for a run to the Atlantic Ocean. Their diet now consisted entirely of flour and salt provisions. Many of the white loyalists deserted, most of them with smallpox. The Ethiopians chose to die free instead, and within a week of landing at St. George's about fifty black corpses littered the shores of the island.<sup>33</sup>

On July 16, the three hundred loyalist troops marched to the opposite end of the island to do battle with a contingent of Maryland militia. The loyalists opened fire "with swivels and musketry" on the Marylanders, who were stationed on the mainland and returned the heavy fire. It was to be the only demonstration of loyalist puissance while at St. George's. Disease and malnutrition soon rendered them incapable of any such tokens of ferocity. On July 25, the Marylanders set an ambush for their numerically superior enemies. Crossing to the island in the early morning hours, the militia force of one hundred hid close to the water's edge where the loyalists normally landed every morning. The advance party sprang the trap too soon, and the main body of troops regained their boats and rowed away. Three or four loyalists were killed, several wounded, and one captured. The militiamen then destroyed the water-casks left on the island and filled in the well before departing.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>General Dent to Maryland Council of Safety, July 19, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:431; Stephen to Lee, July 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:137-38; Major Thomas Price to Maryland Council of Safety, July 23 and 26, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:518, 590.

<sup>34</sup>Price to Maryland Council of Safety, July 26, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:590-91; Col. Jordan to Maryland Council of Safety, July 17, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:382-83. The sources do not indicate the race of any of the victims.

While the main body of troops and the bulk of the flotilla made preparations to leave Virginia forever, Dunmore went looking for enough fresh water to sustain his followers during the voyage to New York. He sailed up the Potomac with three of his five men-of-war and about one hundred and fifty troops, including an unknown number of Ethiopians. At noon on July 22, the entire force attacked the Stafford County home of William Brent, situated just above the mouth of Aquia Creek and not far from the harbor from which the four Stafford runaways had sailed in their attempt to join Dunmore. Why poor Mr. Brent was selected for this singular honor is entirely unknown. One remote possibility is that Dunmore knew the Stafford runaways had tried to sail to him in April and he now hoped desperately to find the local slave population ready to rise up at the slightest encouragement. More likely, the flotilla was not "saluted from the shore as usual [by] ... the musketry [and] concluded they were not expected there and ventured on shore." At any rate, the loyalists easily repulsed about sixty Stafford County militiamen stationed at Brent's and set fire to the main house and the outbuildings before being driven back to their ships by a stout band of militiamen from Prince William County. Instead of increasing the number of black troops in his little army, Dunmore saw it dwindle further. Of the seven dead loyalists, four were Ethiopians.<sup>35</sup>

By the time Dunmore returned to St. George's Island, his forces were "so inconsiderable and contemptible" that the

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<sup>35</sup>Hamond diary entries, July 20 and 23, 1776; Extract of a Letter from Dumfries, VA, no date, Force, 5th ser., 1:490; Maryland Council of Safety to Delegates in Congress, July 26, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:593; diary entry, July 26, 1776, Greene, 2:1065; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), July 29, 1776. According to Hamond, no loyalists were killed at Brent's; instead, he writes that one officer and five men were wounded.

Maryland militia were dismissed and two independent companies were assigned to watch the loyalists. There was little to watch. The flotilla left the island in early August and headed down the Bay. The loyalists made one last attempt to land at Cape Henry and were easily repulsed. On August 7, Dunmore's fleet of forty vessels departed the colony for good.<sup>36</sup>

When the flotilla left the Capes, it split into two squadrons. One, containing Dunmore, the healthy Ethiopians, the remainder of the Fourteenth, and the Tories, headed north for Staten Island. The other headed south for St. Augustine. Specific numbers of Ethiopians in either squadron are hard to come by. Probably, one hundred and fifty started north with Dunmore while seventy went south to East Florida. Two blacks who deserted the fleet near Hampton reported that Dunmore's strength was "near four hundred" when he left the Capes, one hundred and eight of whom were regulars. The two also stated that all four hundred "were now tolerably healthy," but this was apparently not so. Dunmore reported that "there was not a ship in the fleet that did not throw one, two, three or more dead overboard every night." By the time the squadron reached New York on August 14, only thirty regulars were left, and the blacks and Tories numbered one hundred and twenty total. The southern squadron, which probably carried the Ethiopian sick, women, and children,

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<sup>36</sup>Maryland Council of Safety to General Hooper, August 2, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:722; Page to Lee, August 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:216.

arrived in St. Augustine between September 9 and October 18. Thus ended the saga of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Lewis to Lee, August 13, 1776, Lee Papers, 2:213; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), August 9, 1776; Dunmore to Germain, September 4, 1776, Davies, 12:219; Governor Tryon of New York to Germain, August 14, 1776, Force, 5th ser., 1:949; Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), September 7, 1776; Governor Patrick Tonyn of East Florida to Germain, September 9 and October 18, 1776, Davies, 10:372, 390. Quarles states that three hundred blacks went north and cites Hamond's diary entry of August 6 (Negro in the American Revolution, p. 31). However, the diary contains no such entry for this date, nor does it ever mention how many Ethiopians left Virginia.

## CHAPTER FOUR: EPILOGUE

All together, between eleven and twelve hundred runaways responded to Dunmore's call to help save the King. When one considers that Virginia contained over two hundred thousand slaves in 1775, the number who risked their lives to gain freedom seems sneeringly puny. One historian has suggested that "most of the slaves, systematically denied experience in decision-making, were simply unable to respond to such a call [as Dunmore's proclamation of emancipation]." In fact, a significant percentage of those in a position to join the governor made just such a decision.<sup>1</sup>

Between November 1775 and May 1776, slaves from Norfolk and Princess Anne counties found it easiest to join Dunmore because his army was but a short distance away. Of the eight hundred and fifty or so runaways who allied themselves with the governor during this period, probably ninety per cent, or about seven hundred and fifty, came from these two counties. In 1775, Princess Anne County had an adult slave population of about fifteen hundred; numbers for Norfolk County are unavailable. Assuming that there were about the same number of slaves in the latter as in the former, then approximately 25 percent of the adult slaves living in the two counties made it to Dunmore successfully. This percentage does not include the unknown number of slaves, surely not insignificant, who tried to join him from the two-county area but

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<sup>1</sup>Anne Gorman Condon, "The Foundations of Loyalism," in Robert S. Allen, ed., The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyal Provincial Corps and their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983), 3. Quarles estimates that the regiment totalled eight hundred (Negro in the American Revolution, p. 31), and his estimate is not challenged by any other scholar. An anonymous contributor to the Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), October 4, 1776, estimated that Dunmore had "stolen" fifteen hundred slaves.

failed. When one considers that another six hundred and fifty slaves ran to Dunmore from other parts of the colony despite the distance and the obstacles involved, one must conclude that slaves were quite capable of deciding to seek freedom when the chances of success seemed worth the risk.<sup>2</sup>

For Dunmore, raising the Ethiopian Regiment afforded little if any advantage, and probably worked against him in the long run. Unfortunately, the same must be said for the slaves who joined him. Although all of them gained their freedom, few kept it for long, succumbing quickly to the ravages of combat and disease. Only a handful was able to leave the colony to enjoy freedom in peace. When one calculates the price paid by these runaways, particularly the horrible deaths which claimed so many of them, and attempts to balance the payment with the meager returns, one must conclude sadly that their struggle was largely in vain.

When Patrick Henry delivered his immortal demand for either liberty or death, he was not speaking to slaves. No matter; they heard him anyway. And those who could responded to his call. They endured the cold and the mud, hunger and

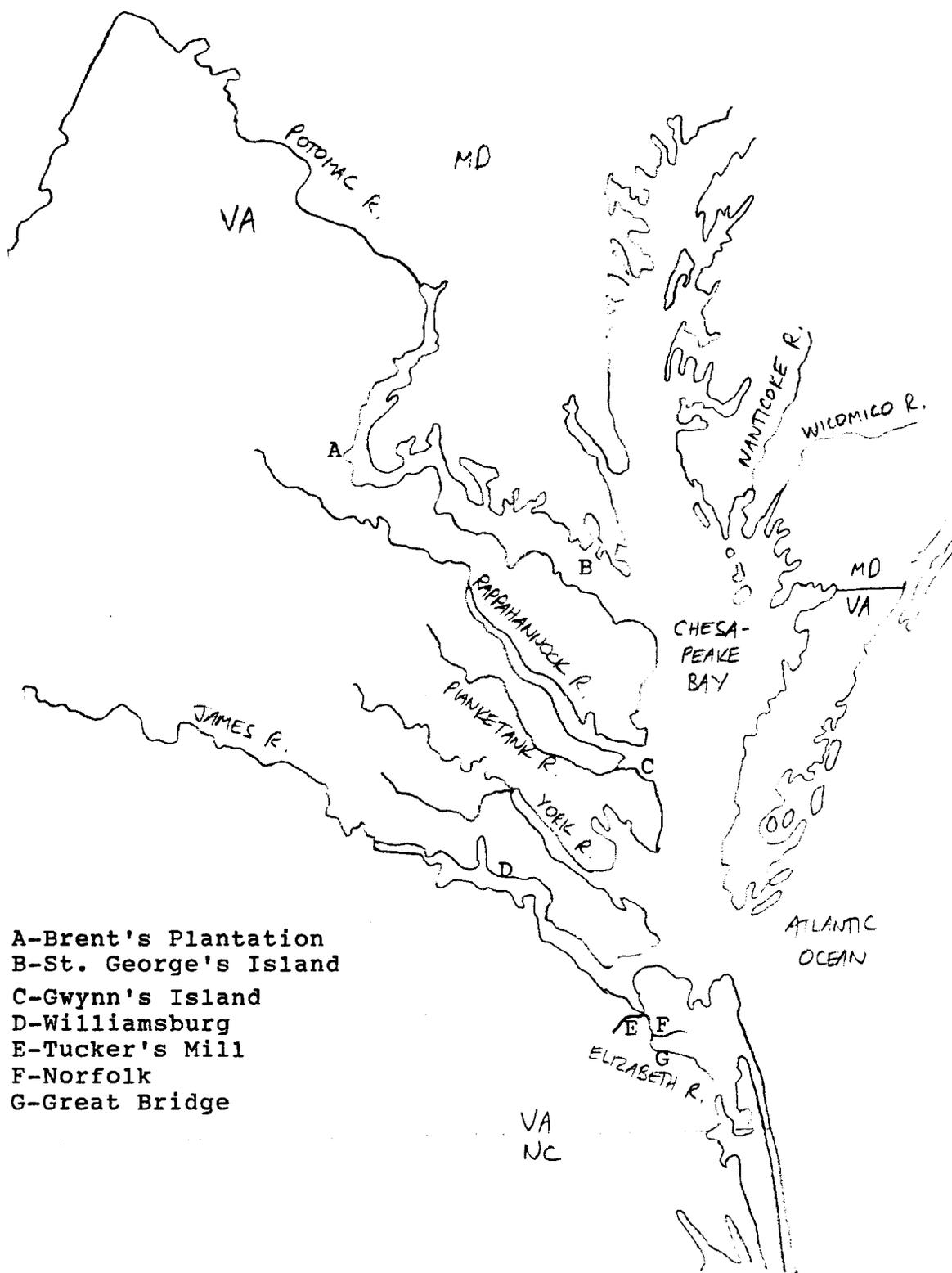
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<sup>2</sup>"Land and Slave Owners, Princess Anne County, 1775," Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary, 3:153-54. These records show that Princess Anne County had an adult (age sixteen and older) slave population of 1394, but this figure does not include the Blackwater Precinct, for which the records cannot be found. Three of the seven remaining precincts reported a slave population of less than one hundred each. Norfolk County may have had more slaves than Princess Anne County. The Census of 1790 lists 5345 slaves for the former, and only 3202 for the latter. If this same ratio held true for 1775, fifteen years earlier, then the total slaves for both counties was approximately four thousand and the percentage of slaves successfully joining Dunmore drops to just under 19 percent. See Bureau of the Census, Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790; Records of the State Enumerations: 1782 to 1785, Virginia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), p. 9.

thirst, disease and deprivation, to fight untrained against a numerically superior foe. They fought and they died, and by their dying gave credence to that which all Americans, black and white alike, are taught from birth: That life without liberty is no life at all, and that death, no matter how painful, is preferable to an existence in bondage.

APPENDIX

MAP A. The Ethiopian Regiment's Theater of Operations



MAP B. The Norfolk Area

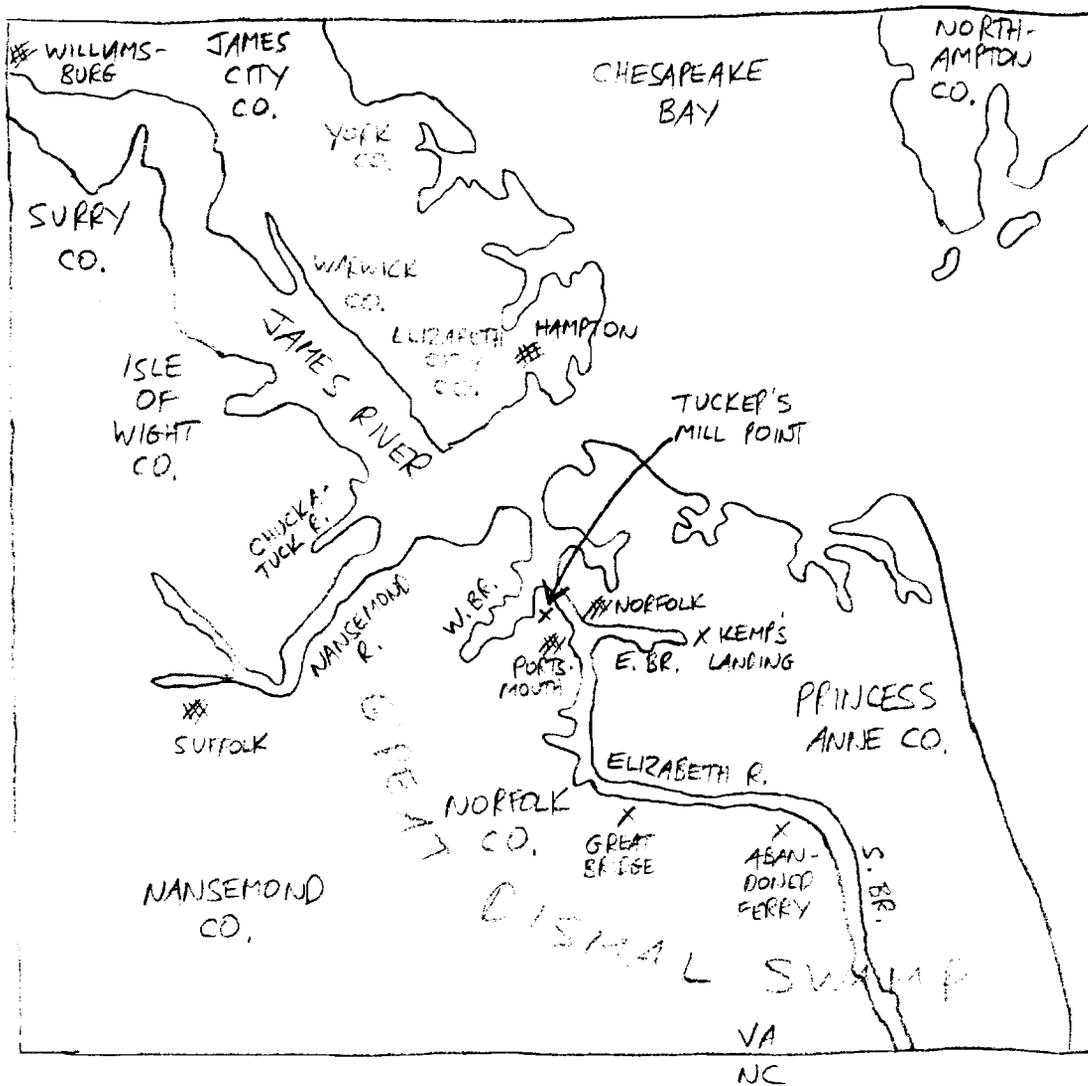


TABLE 1. Henry King's Report and the Reportees' Fates\*

Name	Master	Name	Master
Active, sent to Antigua:			
Tom	Joseph Selden	Will	Joel Cornick
Tawley	Edward Moseley	Harry	"
Jemmy	Thomas Banks	Europe	William Haynes
Lewis	Jacob Keeling	Romeo	Lemuel Cornick
Bob	"		
Active, sent to Fincastle:			
George	Elizabeth Woodhouse	Lewis	Robert Langley
Dick	Edmund Ruffin Jr.	Derry	Edward Cooper
Dick	James Legate	Bob	Robert Shedden
Africa	Charles Sayes	Jasper	William Keeling
George	Samuel Donaldson		
Active, fate unknown:			
Peter	William Keeling	Cato	Stephen Tankard
Luke	"	Michael	Robert Boush
Ishmael	George Gaskin	Frank	John Henley
Cuff	Willis Wilkinson	Tom	Mary Jones
Ned	William Forsythe	Roger	"
Active, died in jail:			
Harry	Arthur Boush		
Not active, returned to master:			
Charles	John Poole	Poole	Willis Hoslin
Cuffy	Charles Boush	Dennis	Widow Hodges
Davy	Charles Jenkins		
Point Comfort Seven, returned to masters:			
Billy	Anthony Robinson	Tom	Merritt Moore
Anthony	Henry Howard	Will	"
Ned	Bennett Tomkins	Jemmy	"
Sam	"		

\*Henry King's Report to the Virginia Convention, January 17, 1776, Scribner, 5:423; Deposition of John Hunter, November 14, 1785, Scribner, 5:426; Proceedings of the Virginia Committee of Safety, February 7, February 8, and April 3, 1776, Scribner, 6:69, 76, 317. The proceedings of April 3 refer to Robert Shedden's slave as Will, while Henry King's report names him Bob.

TABLE 2. John Willoughby's Slaves\*

Women				Men		
Name	Age	# Girls	# Boys	Name	Age	Occupation
Plasant	55	1		Sam	60	sawer
Nancy	46	4		Tobey	54	sawer
Marey	30	2	2	Ned	44	
Judey	28	3	2	Peter	37	carpenter
Lucey	25	1	3	James	35	shoemaker
Kiziah	23		3	Robin	23	sawer
Cate	30	2	1	Bob	30	
Rachel	25		4	Charles	24	
Easter	27		3	Glasgow	21	
Nell	25	2		Will	21	
Letise	23	1		Anthony	19	
Jeney	42			George	18	
Lindah	27	2	2	Jacob	20	
Manda	25		3	Isaac	16	
Dynah	26	2		Brister	25	sawer
Lidia	26	2	1	Moses	23	house servant
Abey	29		3			
Bessie	23	1				
Pegg	18					
Jeney	30					
Joise	16					

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\*"A List of Negroes that Went Off to Dunmore, April 14, 1776," Petition of John Willoughby of Norfolk County to the Virginia House of Delegates, RCHP, 1:343.

TABLE 3. Roster of the Ethiopian Regiment in Late May, 1776

Major Byrd's Company<sup>1</sup>

Max. Villeroy	Jonas Ivy	James Savage
Francis Thorowgood	James Reed	Annaki Whitler
George Thorowgood	Bristol Mitchell	Robert Willoughby
Lawrence Ambler	Jasper Jones	Peter Godwin
Owen Woodhouse	Michael *****	Peter Willoughby
Philip Jones	Samuel Gordon	John Talbot
Arculls Willoughby	Owen Lovats	Sepper Tinnible
Peter Thorowgood	Max. Boush	Argyle Sawyer
Glasgow Willoughby	Moses Holsture	James Daniel
William Anderson	Davie Nimmo	Scipio Thorowgood
Moody Nimmo	Charles Griffin	Thomas White
Sampson Ellegood	Samuel Gimer	John Crocus
Sampson Portsmouth	Owen Jones	Samuel Fry
Henry Drew		

Lord Dunmore's Company<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin Campbell	Robert Flemming	Norfolk Macki
Navin Parker	James Savage	Robert Wallace
Max. Woodhouse	John Everidge	Neal Robinson
Robert Ellegood	Gabriel Armstead	Daniel Hogwood
Jesse Dameron	Samuel Goodwin	Joseph Tucker
Abel Keeling	Lewis Wells	George Tucker
Mingo Peeding	Robert Tucker	Toby Lawrence
Jesse Keeling	Michael Wallace	Caesar Stuart
Gabriel Minge	Benjamin Longwith	Robert Scott
Joseph Clayton	Oliver Curl	Sollomon Robinson
Charles Frazer	Africa Corneck	Thomas Rand
William Byrd	Jacob Hawes	Benjamin King
Philip Harrison	John Stevens	Francis Jackson
Roger Cornicks	Thomas Essex	George Bivan
Frank Newton	Joshua Lawson	

<sup>1</sup>"Morning Rounds of Lord Dunmore's Black Banditti, Distinguished by their Owners' Surnames," Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), August 31, 1776. Crocus' John, Portsmouth's Sampson, Jones' Owen, Fry's Samuel, and Drew's Henry returned to Byrd's company from the hospital brig Adonis on May 31. The others listed were present on board the Dunmore on May 22. The only non-commissioned officer listed for Byrd's company is Corporal John P. Royal, undoubtedly either a regular or a Tory.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Scott's Robert, Clayton's Joseph, Lawson's Joshua, Robinson's Sollomon, and Curl's Oliver were "entered at Gwynn's Island" on May 30. The others members of the company were present at the camp on Gwynn's on May 29.



TABLE 4. Possible Slave Couples Amongst Dunmore's Blacks

Griffin's Charles and Hannah  
 Savage's James and Susanna  
 Everidge's John and Alice  
 Ivy's Jonas and China  
 Parker's Hannah and either Navin or Tony  
 Nimmo's Moody and either Abby or Susan  
 Nimmo's Davie and either Abby or Susan  
 Robinson's Neal and either Lucy, Pleasant, or Abby  
 Robinson's Sollomon and either Lucy, Pleasant, or Abby  
 Boush's Jenny and either Max, Michael, Harry or Cuffy  
 Boush's Judith and either Max, Michael, Harry or Cuffy  
 Thorowgood's Phillis and either Francis, George, Peter or Scipio  
 Thorowgood's Kate and either Francis, George, Peter or Scipio  
 Moseley's Tawley and either Rose or Fanny  
 Sixteen possible couples from among the Willoughby slaves

TABLE 5. Runaways Who May Have Joined the Ethiopian Regiment\*

- Ned: ran from James Edmondson in Essex Co. in July 1775; age 18 (Pinkney, November 16, 1775).
- Will: ran from Isaac Zane in Frederick Co. on November 9, 1775; age 30. Left with two white indentured servants (Pinkney, November 23, 1775).
- Prince, Cato, Charles (or Trash), and Billy Burton: ran from Robert Donald in Prince Edward Co. on November 11, 1775; Billy age 19 or 20 (Dixon and Hunter, November 25, 1775).
- Simon: ran from John Stringer in James City Co.; age 25. Thought to have gone to William Robins' place in Gloucester Co. to be with relatives (Dixon and Hunter, December 2, 1775).
- Anonymous: ran from William Dandridge in Henrico Co. in August 1775; age 18. Had relatives in King William Co. (Dixon and Hunter, December 30, 1775).
- George: ran from James Moss in New Kent Co. in 1772; age 40. Hung around Williamsburg until winter 1774, when Dunmore took him to his place in Frederick Co. (Dixon and Hunter, November 4, 1775).
- Argyle: ran from Jacob Wray in Hampton in late October 1775 (Dixon and Hunter, November 4, 1775).
- Sam: ran from Robert Goodloe in Bute Co., NC on September 13, 1775; age 21 (Dixon and Hunter, December 2, 1775).
- Charles: ran from William Tabb in Bute Co., NC on March 20, 1775; age 23. Raised in Prince George Co., VA (Dixon and Hunter, December 2, 1775).
- Ben: ran from John Gordon in Northumberland Co. in July 1775; age 25 (Dixon and Hunter, November 11, 1775).
- James: ran from Mark Edwards in Chesterfield Co.; age 30. Broke out of Chesterfield Co. jail with three other blacks in July, still at large in November (Dixon and Hunter, November 18, 1775).

\*This table was compiled from runaway slave advertisements in the Virginia Gazette. The information in parentheses indicates the editor and date of publication.

- Harry: ran from John Aylett in James City Co. on November 1, 1775 (Purdie, December 1, 1775).
- Harry: ran from Philip Rootes in King and Queen Co. on September 19, 1775. Suspected to be at West Point with Thomas Moore's slaves (Purdie, December 1, 1775).
- Mike: ran from John West in King William co. on December 21, 1774; age 22 (Purdie, December 1, 1775).
- Ned: ran from Mann Page Jr. in Gloucester Co. on May 14, 1775; age 19 or 20 (Purdie, December 1, 1775).
- Tom: ran from John Scott in Cumberland Co. in December 1775; age 32. May have returned to former master (Mr. Aylett) in King William Co. (Pinkney, January 10, 1776).
- Harry, Lewis, Aaron, and Matthew: ran from Edmund Ruffin in Prince George Co. on November 26, 1775; ages 30 (Harry) and 18 (Matthew). Went off in a yawl with two others who were captured and jailed (Pinkney, January 10, 1776).
- Jim: ran from Thomas Huson in Sussex Co. in 1774; age 24. Still at large in May 1776 (Dixon and Hunter, May 11, 1776).
- Gabriel and Ben: ran from Robert Hart in Spotsylvania Co. on May 5, 1776; Gabriel age 19, Ben age 30. Ben had a wife in Hanover Co., but Hart suspected that he was headed for Dunmore (Dixon and Hunter, May 18, 1776).
- York, Adam, and Harry: ran from John Fry's estate in Buckingham Co. on April 19, 1776; York age 26, Adam age 40, Harry age 30 (Dixon and Hunter, May 18, 1776).
- Daniel: ran from Evan Ragland in Halifax Co. on March 3, 1776; age 35. Stole a horse (Dixon and Hunter, April 6, 1776).
- Saundy: ran from Andrew Estave in Williamsburg; age 27 (Dixon and Hunter, March 23, 1776).
- Solomon: ran from James Kirk Jr. in Lancaster Co. on November 20, 1775; age 30 (Dixon and Hunter, January 13, 1776).
- Quash: ran from Samuel Cary in Gloucester Co. on February 7, 1776; age 21 (Dixon and Hunter, March 23, 1776).

- Jacob: ran from David Hoops in Louisa Co. on March 16, 1776; age 30 (Dixon and Hunter, March 30, 1776).
- Jesse: ran from Samuel Dameron in Brunswick Co. on April 9, 1776; stole a horse from Thomas Ball in Amelia Co. to make his escape (Dixon and Hunter, August 24, 1776).
- Ben: ran from Patrick Rose in Amherst Co. on May 15, 1776; age 30 (Dixon and Hunter, August 3, 1776).
- Bagley: ran from Nicholas Scouvement in Williamsburg in July 1776; age 20. Supposed to be headed for Gloucester Co. where he had relatives (Dixon and Hunter, July 20, 1776).
- George: ran from John Hunter in Fauquier Co. on August 15, 1775; age 20 (Pinkney, January 20, 1776).
- Gabriel: ran from John Hudson in Albemarle Co. in late 1775; age 52 or 53. Suspected to be headed to his wife in Gloucester Co., or to the Eastern Shore where he had once lived (Pinkney, January 20, 1776).
- Tom: ran from Francis Boykin in Isle of Wight Co. in September 1775; age 35. Had apparently been seized by Dunmore's men, escaped from the fleet, and disappeared (Pinkney, January 20, 1776).
- Phill: ran from Landon Carter in Richmond Co. in mid-February, 1776 (Purdie, April 26, 1776).
- Will: ran from George Turberville in Westmoreland Co. in December, 1775; age 35. Supposedly kidnapped by several white men in a pilot boat and on a large float while he was oystering (Purdie, April 19, 1776, supplement).
- Anonymous: three slaves ran from Mrs. Wallace in Hampton on February 1, 1776 (Purdie, February 2, 1776, supplement).
- Bess: ran from John Strange in Albemarle Co. on May 1, 1776; age 24 (Purdie, May 24, 1776 supplement).
- Peter: ran from John Kent in Charles City Co.; age 30. Suspected to be heading to his wife in the lower part of the county (Purdie, May 24, 1776).
- Gilbert: ran from John Evans in Caroline Co. on December 31, 1775; age 34 (Purdie, January 19, 1776).

- Anthony: ran from John Fitzhugh in Caroline Co. on May 9, 1776; age 12 or 13. Stole a horse, and thought to be headed for Mr. Yarborough's at Blandford on the Appomattox River (Purdie, May 31, 1776).
- Jamie and Toby: ran from William Graves in Hanover Co. on May 9, 1776; both age 15 (Purdie, June 21, 1776).
- Appleby: ran from Richard Mitchell in Lancaster Co. on May 1, 1776 (Purdie, May 10, 1776 supplement).
- Will, Davie, and Will: ran from Thomas Penistone on April 2, 1776; Davie age 18 or 19, one of the Wills age 20 (Purdie, April 26, 1776).
- Jack: ran from Alexander Purdie in Williamsburg in early March 1776; age 26 (Purdie, March 8, 1776).
- James: ran from Peter Pelham in Williamsburg on March 10, 1776 (Purdie, March 22, 1776).
- Esther: ran from John Shepherd in Williamsburg on May 24, 1776; age 16 (Purdie, June 14, 1776).

TABLE 6. Enumeration of the Ethiopian Regiment\*

Present during the Battle of Great Bridge.....	430
killed in action.....	30
captured.....	29
deserted.....	70
left behind when Dunmore evacuated Norfolk.....	150
evacuated from Norfolk.....	150
died at sea, first week.....	75
died at sea, second to eighth week.....	75
Joined Dunmore at Tucker's Mill.....	425
died at Tucker's Mill.....	200
evacuated to Gwynn's Island.....	225
Joined Dunmore at Gwynn's Island.....	250
deserted or captured at Gwynn's Island.....	5
died at Gwynn's Island.....	245
Joined Dunmore from Maryland.....	50
deserted on way to St. George's Island.....	2
died at St. George's Island.....	50
killed in action at Brent's.....	4
Total who joined Dunmore.....	1155
Left Virginia alive.....	220
went north with Dunmore.....	150
went south to St. Augustine.....	70

\*All figures are approximate. Sources are indicated in the text.

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