Andrew Lewis Biography

Andrew Lewis

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Biography

Andrew Lewis (ca. 1720-1781), American soldier during Lord Dunmore's War, won an important victory over Native Americans that stabilized the frontier during the American Revolution and prepared the way for westward expansion.

Andrew Lewis was born in Donegal, Ireland, and fled to America with his parents after his father had killed the landlord in self-defense. Andrew became a pioneer settler in Virginia's Roanoke River frontier. There he served as justice of the peace, county lieutenant, and member of the House of Burgesses. However, he decided on a military career. His Army service started badly with a succession of defeats. He was with George Washington when their forces surrendered at Ft. Necessity in 1754. He was also with Gen. Braddock's defeated army but apparently was not present at the disastrous ambush of 1755. Three years later Lewis was captured during the Ft. Duquesne reconnaissance of Maj. James Grant and taken to Montreal as a prisoner.

Lewis's luck finally began to turn when he was appointed a Virginia commissioner to the Indian treaty concluded with the Six Nations at Ft. Stanwix in New York in 1768. In 1774 Lord Dunmore, British governor of Virginia, chose him to lead a force against Native Americans who were raiding the border. Determined not to disappoint the governor, Lewis led his men in a skillful 160-mile march across the Allegheny Mountains to Point Pleasant (now in West Virginia). There he was attacked by a Shawnee force led by the famed chief Cornstalk. Lewis then rallied his men. In the bloody battle that followed, he lost 81 men, and 140 others were wounded. However, Lewis's force killed 200 Indians and so demoralized the remainder that he won an uneasy peace from them on the exposed frontier.

Lewis's victory nullified the Quebec Act of 1774, which had blocked American expansion westward by extending the Canadian border down to the Ohio River. It also set the stage for George Rogers Clark's successful campaign in Illinois during 1778 and 1779 and, most important, opened the way for westward settlement by the new United States of America after the Revolution.

During the American Revolution, Lewis served as a brigadier general. He resigned his Army commission in 1777 because of ill health but continued to serve the state of Virginia, especially as a member of Governor Thomas Jefferson's executive council. He died on September 26, 1781.