

Tensions Build in October 1775

On October 12, 1775, John Murray, Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal colonial governor, and Captain Samuel Leslie, the senior British Army officer in Virginia, led a force of 40 soldiers to seize nineteen cannons hidden in the woods about three miles from the shoreline near Norfolk.

Five days later on October 17, Lord Dunmore's forces conducted a raid at Kemp's Landing (modern day Kempsville in Virginia Beach). They broke open a blacksmith's shop, destroyed about 50 muskets that were under repair, pillaged several private residences, and seized two local militia officers and four privates as prisoners. The officers were William Robinson of Princess Anne County, a delegate to the 3rd Virginia Convention, and Thomas Matthews of Norfolk, Captain of a company of the Princess Anne District Minute Battalion. The object of the raid had been a shipment of gunpowder, but that had been removed before British troops arrived.

On October 19, Captain Leslie led another party ashore about two miles from Norfolk and seized twenty more cannons, 6-pound and 3-pound guns. Since arriving in July, he reported seizing seventy-seven cannons hidden in the area surrounding Norfolk, seemingly significantly reducing the Patriots' ability to effectively fight the British.

The next day Captain Charles Fordyce arrived with two lieutenants, three sergeants, three corporals, two drummers and fifty-five privates to reinforce Captain Leslie's detachment of British troops of the 14th Regiment of Foot. They used the Gosport Shipyard (today Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth) as their base of operations. This provided Lord Dunmore 174 British regulars to deal with several thousand Patriot troops forming at College Camp in Williamsburg.

In response the Virginia Committee of Safety ordered Patriot Colonel William Woodford, commanding the 2nd Virginia Regiment, to cross the James River, secure the citizens and their property, liberate Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties (modern cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach) from royal colonial rule and eject Lord Dunmore's forces. Armed conflict seemed inevitable.