

Connecorte (Old Hop) ^[1]

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by D. H. Corkran, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023

fl. 1740–60

Connecorte (Old Hop), the First Man or Ulustuli of Overhill Chota and therefore of the Cherokee ^[2] nation, was sometimes referred to as the "Fire King" but was called "Old Hop" by the traders because of his physical disability, said to have been caused by a childhood accident. Before 1751, South Carolina's official contacts with the Cherokees were made through the "Emperor" of Great Tellico, an office created by Sir Alexander Cuming ^[3], who on his own initiative visited the restive Cherokees in 1730 and induced them to send a delegation with him to England to make a treaty of trade and alliance with the Crown. The "Emperor" proved a convenient tool for exercising English control over the Cherokees. Presumably Connecorte, little known to the English, came to the headship of Chota, the true capital of the Cherokees, before 1740, and in true nativist tradition was willing that other men, notably his right-hand man, Attakullakulla ^[4] or the Little Carpenter, should front for him. The extent to which he initiated policy is uncertain. As first man he was expected to subordinate his will to that of his council and to be the impartial arbiter of disputes and the upholder of traditional ways. He was the symbol of Cherokee nativist independence and as such was jealous of the "Emperor" of Great Tellico, upon whom the English showered favors.

In the 1740s, Chota, under Connecorte and the Little Carpenter, extricated the Cherokees from wars with the northern Indians and developed an intercourse with the French. At the end of the decade, French influence was channeled into the Cherokees through a French agent whom the English called "French John." Similarly, to Connecorte French John had a physical disability, French John reputedly had been taken prisoner in a Cherokee raid on French Mississippi convoys and had been adopted into Connecorte's household. However, Connecorte and the Little Carpenter did not desire to alienate the English, merely to establish a bargaining position. During disorders in the Cherokee nation occasioned by northern Indians summoned to help the Cherokees in their war on the Creek Indians, Connecorte himself disciplined those Indians who looted the Chota trader's store. Nevertheless, South Carolina embargoed the Cherokee trade, and the embargo, as intended, crippled the Cherokee defense against the Creeks. Chota then sought to increase its power and to undermine Great Tellico by gathering defeated Lower Towns to itself. Connecorte accepted the Little Carpenter's determination to seek a French or Virginia trade, or both, sending a message to the French at Fort Toulouse in Alabama and the Little Carpenter himself to Virginia. South Carolina's Governor James Glen ^[5] then looked upon Connecorte and Chota as hostile to the English.

Chota, bent on its own policies, did not send deputies to the November 1751 meeting at Charlestown with Glen, arranged by the headmen of Tellico and Hiwassee. The inability of the Tellico-Hiwassee to implement the treaty made there and to get Glen to halt the Creek war, which he continued to tolerate in order to discipline the Cherokees, bankrupted the Tellico "Emperorship." Chota and Connecorte took over and in April 1752 sent a conciliatory message to Glen, suggesting that South Carolina should treat only with them and arguing that the embargo violated the Treaty of 1730 with the Crown. When Glen learned that the Tellico "Emperor" himself had been dallying with Virginia, he turned to Chota. Connecorte and the Little Carpenter took advantage of the situation; in June 1753 the Little Carpenter at Charlestown, with talk of going to the French and going to Virginia, forced Glen to agree to a Creek peace and to make trade concessions. Glen, seeing that he had formidable powers to deal with in Chota and Connecorte, decided to build a fort in the Lower Cherokee towns near Keowee, which as the center of English power could undercut Chota's influence. Connecorte and the Little Carpenter continued to negotiate with the French and Virginia.

Certain non-English headmen among the Overhills, perhaps instigated by South Carolina traders, then decided to pressure Connecorte and the Little Carpenter into giving up their French and Virginia negotiations. They accused Connecorte of taking English presents on false pretenses and the Little Carpenter of having violated his sacred word, given when he was in England to make the Treaty of 1730. Connecorte threatened to resign and even to commit suicide, but his relatives dissuaded him. The Little Carpenter, who had been severely beaten, became strongly pro-Carolina.

In May 1755 the Little Carpenter persuaded Connecorte to meet Glen at the conference of Saluda, S.C., where in return for favorable trade concessions and Glen's promise to build a fort among the Overhills, he joined the Little Carpenter in ceding overlordship of all Cherokee lands to the English Crown. For this latter act, both he and the Little Carpenter fell into the bad graces of Cherokee nativists, but the two chiefs expected the benefits derived from the treaty to overcome opposition. Connecorte's position became difficult when Glen failed to implement his promises. Nevertheless, though embittered, he refused a Shawnee invitation for the Cherokees to join the French in their war upon the English. He and his councilor now sought to play off Virginia against South Carolina by sending warriors to Virginia to help in the frontier war and sending the Little Carpenter to Charlestown to demand action.

Hampered by a parsimonious assembly, Glen moved slowly. The Overhills turned again to Virginia and at the Treaty of Broad River with Virginia commissioners, March 1756, obtained a promise of a Virginia fort at Chota and a Virginia trade,

in return for a promise that more warriors would go to Virginia. But Virginia, too, moved slowly, and Connecorte once again, with the aid of Shawnee visitors and French John, opened correspondence with the French, seeking peace and trade at New Orleans and Detroit. The Little Carpenter then confronted Connecorte, forcing him to promise that he meant no harm to the English and that the Little Carpenter could continue to treat with South Carolina.

When, late in 1756, Glen's successor, [William Henry Lyttleton](#) ^[6], succeeded in having Fort Loudon built near Chota, planning eventually to liquidate Shawnee missions to the Cherokees, Connecorte enabled French John to escape from the Cherokee country.

In 1759, after the murder of Cherokee warriors in Virginia by Virginia frontiersmen, the Cherokees demanded war on the English. Connecorte supported the belligerents and plotted to have the Little Carpenter, who was pursuing a peace policy, assassinated. Learning of this plan, the Little Carpenter moved to have Connecorte deposed and declared himself the head of the Cherokees. The nativists would not follow the Little Carpenter's lead but, although Connecorte remained first man, his death occurred before the Cherokees actually went to war with South Carolina.

References:

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From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#),^[12]

1 January 1979 | Corkran, D. H.

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