

The Duke of Cumberland Hand

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A phenomenal hand at whist. The Duke of Cumberland, son of George III, King of England, was an inveterate gambler for high stakes. One day, at the notorious gaming rooms in Bath, it is said that he was dealt the following hand:

♠ A K Q
♥ A K Q J
♦ A K
♣ K J 9 7

The game being whist, the last card, a club, was turned to set the trump suit. The Duke, sitting at dealer's left, had the opening lead. In accordance with sound whist precepts, he opened the seven of clubs. Obviously it was to his interest to knock out all the opponent's trumps as quickly as possible to avoid the ruffing of any of his solid top cards.

The Duke's opponents proceeded to assert that he would not win a single trick, and to infuriate him into a bet. The complete deal was:

	♠ J 10 9 8 7 6		
	♥ 10 9 8 7 6		
	♦ Q J		
	♣ —		
♠ —		♠ 5 4 3 2	
♥ —		♥ 5 4 3 2	
♦ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	W N E	♦ —	
♣ A Q 10 8	S	♣ 6 5 4 3 2	
	♠ A K Q		
	♥ A K Q J		
	♦ A K		
	♣ K J 9 7		

West won the club seven with the eight, and led a diamond which was trumped by his partner. East returned a club, the Duke's nine being taken by the ten, and a second diamond was trumped by East. East led his last trump into his partner's tenace over the Duke, and West won and led the final trump from his hand, felling the Duke's King. West's seven established diamonds won the last seven tricks.

This display of virtuosity by East-West cost the Duke the sum of 20,000 pounds or nearly \$100,000 (equal to \$750,000 in modern terms).

Such is the story of the "Duke of Cumberland's Hand" as related by Professor Richard Proctor in *How to Play Whist* (1885). One wonders why the Duke, an experienced whist player, did not speculate on how his opponents could foretell the outcome. (Remember that no hand is exposed in whist.) A more plausible version of this legendary episode suggests that the South hand was given to the Duke, who knew it was manufactured and ventured to bet in the face of that knowledge.

The victim may have been an earlier Duke, "Butcher" Cumberland, son of George II, but the scant evidence favors the later Duke.