

While at one end of the lake the force of Abercromby was diminished by detachments and disease, that of Montcalm at the other was so increased by reinforcements that a forward movement on his part seemed possible. He contented himself, however, with strengthening the fort, reconstructing the lines that he had defended so well, and sending out frequent war-parties by way of Wood Creek and South Bay, to harass Abercromby's communications with Fort Edward. These parties, some of which consisted of several hundred men, were generally more or less successful; and one of them, under La Corne, surprised and destroyed a large wagon train escorted by forty soldiers. When Abercromby heard of it, he ordered Rogers, with a strong detachment of provincials, light infantry, and rangers, to go down the lake in boats, cross the mountains to the narrow waters of Lake Champlain, and cut off the enemy. But though Rogers set out at two in the morning, the French retreated so fast that he arrived too late. As he was on his way back, he was met by a messenger from the General with orders to intercept other French parties reported to be hovering about Fort Edward. On this he retraced his steps, marched through the forest to where Whitehall now stands, and thence made his way up Wood Creek to old Fort Anne, a relic of former wars, abandoned and falling to decay. Here, on the neglected "clearing" that surrounded the ruin, his followers encamped. They counted seven hundred in all, and consisted of about eighty rangers, a body of Connecticut men under Major Putnam, and a small regular force, chiefly light infantry, under Captain Dalzell, the brave officer who was afterwards killed by Pontiac's warriors at Detroit.

Up to this time Rogers had observed his usual caution, commanding silence on the march, and forbidding fires at night; but, seeing no signs of an enemy, he forgot himself; and on the following morning, the eighth of August, he and Lieutenant Irwin, of the light infantry, amused themselves by firing at a mark on a wager. The shots reached the ears of four hundred and fifty French and Indians under the famous partisan Marin, who at once took steps to reconnoitre and ambuscade his rash enemy. For nearly a mile from the old fort the forest had formerly been cut down and burned; and Nature had now begun to reassert herself, covering the open tract with a dense growth of bushes and saplings almost impervious to anything but a wild-cat, had it not been traversed by a narrow Indian path. Along this path the men were forced to march in single file. At about seven o'clock, when the two marksmen had decided their bet, and before the heavy dew of the night was dried upon the bushes, the party slung their packs and set out. Putnam was in the front with his Connecticut men; Dalzell followed with the regulars; and Rogers, with his rangers, brought up the rear of the long and slender line. Putnam himself led the way, shouldering through the bushes, gun in hand; and just as the bluff yeoman emerged from them to enter the forest-growth beyond, the air was rent with yells, the thickets before him were filled with Indians, and one of them, a Caughnawaga chief, sprang upon him, hatchet in hand. He had time to cock his gun and snap it at the breast of his assailant; but it missed fire, and he was instantly seized and dragged back into the forest, as were also a lieutenant named Tracy and three private men. Then the firing began. The French and Indians, lying across the path in a semicircle, had the advantage of position and surprise. The Connecticut men fell back among the bushes in disorder; but soon rallied, and held the enemy in check while Dalzell and Rogers—the latter of whom was nearly a mile behind—were struggling through briers and thickets to their aid. So close was the brushwood that it was full half an hour before they could get their followers ranged in some kind of order in front of the enemy; and even then each man was forced to fight for himself as best he could. Humphreys, the biographer of Putnam, blames Rogers severely for not coming at once to the aid of the Connecticut men; but two of their captains declare that he came with all possible speed; while a regular officer present highly praised him to Abercromby for cool and officer-like conduct. As a man his deserts were small; as a bushfighter he was beyond reproach. Another officer recounts from hearsay the remarkable conduct of an Indian, who sprang into the midst of the English and killed two of them with his hatchet; then mounted on a log and defied them all. One of the regulars tried to knock him down with the butt of his musket; but though the blow made him bleed, he did not fall, and would have killed his assailant if Rogers had not shot him dead.

The firing lasted about two hours. At length some of the Canadians gave way, and the rest of the French and Indians followed.² They broke into small parties to elude pursuit, and reuniting towards evening, made their bivouac on a spot surrounded by impervious swamps.

Rogers remained on the field and buried all his own dead, forty-nine in number. Then he resumed his march to Fort Edward, carrying the wounded on litters of branches till the next day, when he met a detachment coming with wagons to his relief. A party sent out soon after for the purpose reported that they had found and buried more than a hundred French and Indians. From this time forward the war-parties from Ticonderoga greatly relented in their activity.

The adventures of the captured Putnam were sufficiently remarkable. The Indians, after dragging him to the rear, lashed him fast to a tree so that he could not move a limb, and a young savage amused himself by throwing a hatchet at his head, striking it into the wood as close as possible to the mark without hitting it. A French petty officer then thrust the muzzle of his gun violently against the prisoner's body, pretended to fire it at him, and at last struck him in the face with the butt; after which dastardly proceeding he left him. The French and Indians being forced after a time to fall back, Putnam found himself between the combatants and exposed to bullets from both sides; but the enemy, partially recovering the ground they had lost, unbound him, and led him to a safe distance from the fight. When the retreat began, the Indians hurried him along with them, stripped of coat, waistcoat, shoes, and stockings, his back burdened with as many packs of the wounded as could be piled upon it, and his wrists bound so tightly together that the pain became intense. In his torment he begged them to kill him; on which a French officer who was near persuaded them to untie his hands and take off some of the packs, and the chief who had captured him gave him a pair of moccasins to protect his lacerated feet. When they encamped at night, they prepared to burn him alive, stripped him naked, tied him to a tree, and gathered dry wood to pile about him. A sudden shower of rain interrupted their pastime; but when it was over they began again, and surrounded him with a circle of brushwood which they set on fire. As they were yelling and dancing their delight at the contortions with which he tried to avoid the rising flames, Marin, hearing what was going forward, broke through the crowd, and with a courageous humanity not too common among Canadian officers, dashed aside the burning brush, untied the prisoner, and angrily upbraided his tormentors. He then restored him to the chief who had captured him, and whose right of property in his prize the others had failed to respect. The Caughnawaga treated him at first with kindness; but, with the help of his tribesmen, took effectual means to prevent his escape, by laying him on his back, stretching his arms and legs in the form of a St. Andrew's cross, and binding the wrists and ankles fast to the stems of young trees. This was a mode of securing prisoners in vogue among Indians from immemorial time; but, not satisfied with it, they placed brushwood upon his body, and then laid across it the long slender stems of saplings, on the ends of which several warriors lay down to sleep, so that the slightest movement on his part would rouse them. Thus he passed a night of misery, which did not prevent him from thinking of the ludicrous figure he made in the hands of the tawny Philistines.

On the next night, after a painful march, he reached Ticonderoga, where he was questioned by Montcalm, and afterwards sent to Montreal in charge of a French officer, who showed him the utmost kindness. On arriving, woefully tattered, bruised, scorched, and torn, he found a friend in Colonel Schuyler, himself a prisoner on parole, who helped him in his need, and through whose good offices the future major-general of the Continental Army was included in the next exchange of prisoners.