

Oxley James Macdonald

With Rogers on the Frontier



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With Rogers on the Frontier / J. Oxley — «Public Domain»,

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J. Macdonald Oxley

With Rogers on the Frontier / A Story of 1756

CHAPTER I

ENGLISH AGAINST FRENCH

The great conflict between England and France for supremacy upon the North American continent was drawing near its final stage. It had been waged for more than a century with varying fortunes, and over a vast extent of territory. The sea-girt province of Acadia in the extreme east, and the rich valley of the Ohio in the far west had alike been the scene of bloody encounters, and now the combatants were coming to close grips in that picturesque and beautiful portion of New York State where the twin lakes Champlain and George lay embosomed amid forest-clad hills.

The possession of these lakes was divided between the two rivals, the French being masters of Lake Champlain, and the English of Lake George, and their crystal waters were again and again reddened with the life blood of the antagonists and their Indian allies as they fought fiercely for the prize of sole possession that the way between Canada and the colonies might be completely closed to whichever power was vanquished.

In the spring of the year 1755 the New England colonies combined to undertake the capture of Crown Point, the French stronghold on Lake Champlain, which for the past quarter of a century had been a veritable hornet's nest. To Governor Shirley of Massachusetts was due the credit of inspiring the undertaking, and his province was foremost in voting men and money toward its accomplishment, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and finally New York followed suit, and the result was a little army of several thousand men, whose appearance would have filled a European commander with scorn.

For they were none of them soldiers, but simply farmers and farmers' sons who had gallantly volunteered for the campaign, leaving their scattered dingy homes in the midst of rough fields of corn and pumpkins to shoulder the guns they all knew so well how to use, and when the fighting was over, if so be that they escaped the bullet and tomahawk, to return to their ploughing and sowing as though they had merely been out on a hunting trip.

Only one corps boasted a uniform, blue faced with red. The others were content with their ordinary clothes, and the most of them brought their own guns. They had no bayonets, but carried hatchets in their belts instead, and at their sides were slung powder-horns on which they had carved quaint devices with the points of their pocket knives.

Their whole appearance was neither martial nor picturesque, and gave them no excuse for pride, but they were brave, brawny fellows, clear of head, quick of eye, swift of foot, and sure of hand, and incomparably better adapted for the irregular warfare of the time than the highly disciplined soldiery of either England or France. They knew the forests as the city-bred man knows the streets, and by day or night could traverse their fastnesses without fear of losing their way or falling into the hands of the enemy.

They were of all ages and sizes so to speak, from boys in their teens to gray-haired grandfathers, and from dwarfs to giants, but they all could give a good account of themselves in a fight either at long or close range.

The commander of this curious army was no less remarkable than his men, for he had never seen service, and knew nothing of war. An Irishman by birth, William Johnson had held an extensive domain on the banks of the Mohawk River for a score of years, and grown powerful and rich by trading with the Indians of the Five Nations who found him far more honest and reliable than his

Dutch rivals in the business, and over whom he came to acquire so profound an influence that the Government made him Indian Superintendent, an appointment that was hailed with joy throughout the Iroquois Confederacy.

He had taken to himself a Mohawk squaw for wife, and lived in almost baronial style in a fortified house which was a stronghold against his foes and a centre of lavish hospitality to friends and visitors whether white or red.

Governor Shirley had chosen him for the responsible post of commander because by so doing he prevented any jealousy among the New England colonies, gratified the important province of New York, and secured the co-operation of the Five Nations, a threefold advantage that could be secured in no other way.

The gathering place was at Albany, and here in the month of July were assembled several thousand provincials ready for the fray. Hither also came a swarm of Johnson's Mohawks, warriors, squaws, and children. They made things very lively. They adorned the General's face with war-paint, and he joined them in the war dance, and then with his sword cut the first slice from the ox that had been roasted whole for their entertainment.

"I shall be glad," remarked a New England surgeon surveying the somewhat riotous goings-on with a touch of complacent contempt, "if they fight as eagerly as they ate their ox, and drank their wine."

Among the spectators of these rude festivities stood a youth whose otherwise pleasing countenance was so clouded that one seeing it could hardly fail to wonder what troubled him thus deeply.

Although still in his teens he had reached the stature of a man, and his well-knit figure gave evidence of no common share of strength and activity. He was dressed in a suit of tanned buckskin that became him particularly well, and with his double-barrelled smoothbore, carved powder-horn, keen-edged tomahawk, and long-bladed hunting knife was fully equipped to meet the foe.

The son of a pioneer settler upon the northern border of Massachusetts, Seth Allen had already drunk to its depths the cup of sorrow, for at one fell swoop the dusky allies of the French had rendered him a homeless orphan. With his own eyes he had beheld his parents tomahawked and scalped, the farmhouse burned, and the stock slaughtered while he had been carried off for torture in the Indian camp.

Escaping by a happy chance he made his way back to New England, and at once volunteered for active service against the French. Henceforward he had but one purpose in life – to serve his country in the field, and in view of what he had suffered it is easy to understand with what impatience he awaited the advance of the English against Crown Point, and how he chafed at the delay which seemed to him inexcusable.

Now above all things this expedition needed to act promptly, and yet preparations went on with exasperating slowness. The troops and supplies were contributed by five different legislatures, and they each wanted their own way about something. Indeed at one time there was a regular deadlock because they could not agree as to their respective quotas of artillery and stores.

"The expedition goes on very much as a snail runs," grumbled Surgeon Williams. "It seems we may possibly see Crown Point this time twelve months."

Seth Allen, burning with eagerness to forget in the excitement of action the horrors which haunted his memory, could not understand why there should be all this useless dawdling, and one day ventured to address a group of men whom he knew to be among the leaders.

"Can you tell me, good sirs," he said, doffing his cap respectfully, "how much longer we are to be here doing nothing?"

In the little party were Colonel Titcomb and Seth Pomeroy of Massachusetts, who had both fought so well at Louisbourg, the sturdy Israel Putnam of Connecticut, and brave John Stark of New

Hampshire, and they all turned to look at the speaker while a suspicion of a smile curved the corners of their lips.

"Your question is not easy to answer, young man." It was Colonel Titcomb who spoke. "We would fain have some definite knowledge upon that matter ourselves. But may I inquire your name, and how you came here? You seem to have scarce sufficient years for such hard fighting as must fall to our lot if our purpose be effected."

A ruddy glow showed through the tan of the youth's cheeks, and he lowered both head and voice as he replied:

"My name is Seth Allen, and I come from Massachusetts. My father and mother were killed by the Indians who are in league with the French, and our home was burned. I am here because I have no other desire than to fight against those who have broken my heart."

There was a strange simplicity in the words. They came from the heart of the speaker, and they went straight to the hearts of his hearers. The veteran warriors looked at each other, and then at the youth with eyes full of intelligent sympathy, and Colonel Pomeroy, stepping forward, laid his hand gently upon the youth's shoulder, saying:

"We have heard of your sad story. No one has better reason to be here than you, and we can well understand how hard you find this waiting. But patience is a soldierly virtue, and you must have your share of it. There will be plenty of fighting in due time."

The blush deepened upon Seth's countenance at the implied reproof, and, murmuring his excuses for having thus interrupted their conference, he moved away.

"That boy bears a heavy heart," said Colonel Titcomb, "and I should not like to be either the first Frenchman or Indian that he meets, for he has a long account to settle with our hated foes."

Patience in no small degree certainly was required by the provincials who had gathered together for active service, not to waste time in aimless dallying, and their anxiety to be up and doing was increased when the four Mohawk scouts which Johnson had sent to Canada returned with the startling intelligence that the French were fully informed of the English designs, and that eight thousand men were being sent to the defence of Crown Point.

Upon this a council of war was held whereat it was decided to send to the several provinces for reinforcements, and at the same time to begin the movement northward lest the volunteers, wearied of inaction, should lose heart in the enterprise.

Accordingly the main body, accompanied by a train of Dutch wagons, marched slowly over the stumps and roots of a newly made road, and presently reached the borders of the most beautiful lake which Johnson loyally called Lake George in honor of the King of England.

Here camp was made on a piece of rough ground by the water's edge, the men pitching their tents among the stumps of the lately felled trees.

With a clear water-way to their destination, and hundreds of bateaux hauled overland from Fort Lyman (afterward called Fort Edward), ready to transport them thither, the men's spirits rose, for they naturally thought they would soon be led against the enemy, but in this they were again disappointed.

Johnson sent out scouts in different directions, but otherwise did nothing, and Seth Allen, at last unable to endure the continued inaction any longer, begged so earnestly of his captain to be allowed to go out scouting, that when an Indian brought word that he had found the trail of a body of men moving toward Fort Lyman, and Johnson called for a volunteer to carry a letter of warning to Colonel Blanchard, the commander of the fort, the captain at once sent for Seth, and telling him what was wanted said:

"Now, young man, there's the chance you have been fretting for."

"And I'm ready to take it," responded Seth promptly.

CHAPTER II

A PERILOUS RIDE

In order to a clear understanding of the situation it is necessary at this point to leave the provincial army for a little while and take a glance at what the French were doing.

They were by no means idle. While the British were preparing to attack Crown Point they were preparing to defend it, having first got warning of their purpose from the letters of the unfortunate Braddock found on the battlefield, which information was confirmed by the report of a reconnoitring party that had made its way as far as the Hudson, and returned with the news that Johnson's forces were already on the field.

The Marquis de Vandreuil, Governor of Canada, who on his part had been meditating an expedition for the capture of Oswego, and for this purpose had got together several battalions of regular soldiers under the command of Baron Dieskau, thereupon changed their destination from Lake Ontario to Lake Champlain.

Passing up the Richelieu River these troops embarked in boats and canoes for Crown Point. Their veteran leader knew that the foes with whom he had to deal were not disciplined soldiers, but simply a mob of countrymen, and he never doubted for a moment that he would put them to flight at the first meeting, and keep them going until he had chased them back to Albany. Such, too, was the pleasant conviction of the Marquis de Vandreuil, who wrote to him in this strain:

"Make all haste, for when you return we shall send you to Oswego to execute our first design."

And he had obeyed orders to such good purpose that while Johnson's force lay idle at Lake George he had reached Crown Point at the head of nearly four thousand men, regulars, Canadians, and Indians.

Dieskau had no thought of waiting to be attacked. His troops were commanded to hold themselves ready to move at a moment's notice. The officers were bidden to take nothing with them but one spare shirt, one spare pair of shoes, a blanket, a bearskin, and twelve days' provisions, while the Indians were strictly enjoined not to amuse themselves by taking scalps until the enemy was entirely defeated, since they could kill ten men in the time required to scalp one, a grim injunction that reveals like a lightning flash the barbarity of that border warfare when all the laws of humanity were ignored.

Early in the month of September a scouting party brought in an English prisoner caught near Fort Lyman. He was questioned under threat of being handed over to the Indians for torture if he did not tell the truth, but, nothing daunted, he endeavored to lure the French into a trap by telling them that the English army had fallen back to Albany, leaving only a few hundred men at Fort Lyman, which he said was a place to be easily taken.

Dieskau at once resolved on a rapid movement to seize the fort, and, leaving a part of his force at Ticonderoga, he embarked the rest in canoes, and hurried along through the narrow part of Lake Champlain, stretching southward through the wilderness.

Reaching the lower end of the lake they left their canoes under guard, and began their march through the dense forest toward Fort Lyman. They numbered fifteen hundred in all, and it was concerning their approach that the report had been brought in to the English camp, which Seth Allen was ready to carry to the endangered fort.

"You seem a likely lad," said Johnson when Seth was brought to him, "and will no doubt do as well as any one. You had better take a horse. You will run a better chance of getting through."

Seth was quite willing to make the venture afoot, but he was still better pleased to be mounted, and a little later he galloped away over the rough road on his perilous task with the important letter hidden in his bosom.

For the first time since coming to the camp he felt in good spirits, and he would have whistled to keep himself company had he not known better than to make any more noise than was absolutely necessary.

He fully realized the danger he was running. Capture by the French meant probable torture, and certain death, while the chances were that if perceived by the foe or their merciless allies he would be shot on sight as so many others had been before him.

But this knowledge in no wise clouded his brave young spirit. He was too glad at being allowed to undertake the perilous mission to be concerned about his safety, and with every faculty keen for hint or sign of danger he hastened along the stump-strewn road toward his destination.

A high rate of speed was not possible owing to the roughness of the road, but he made very good progress nevertheless, and one-half the fourteen miles of the way had been covered ere the still solitude through which he was passing gave token of other human life.

Then it was revealed in startling enough fashion, for as Seth rode along carefully through the stumps and roots which were ready to bring his steed to his knees, a shot rang out on his right, followed by a blood-curdling whoop, and a bullet whistled uncomfortably close to his head.

"Now for it!" he exclaimed, bending low over his horse's neck and driving in the spurs.

The willing creature responded with a bound that nearly unseated his rider and then sprang away at the top of his speed, soon leaving the Indian scout far behind.

If he were the only one to discover Seth it would be well enough, but that was hardly to be hoped for. The very fact of his presence implied the proximity of the French as Seth thoroughly understood, and at any moment others might show themselves.

On he rode, glancing anxiously to right and left, yet keeping a close watch on his horse. Again and again the animal stumbled over a root, but, thanks to Seth's skill in the saddle, did not go down, and the remaining distance to Fort Lyman was rapidly being decreased, when once more peril appeared in the path.

This time it was a small party of Canadians out on scouting duty, and they were right in the rider's road. He must either turn back, or go on to apparently certain capture.

For an instant Seth was at a loss which course to pursue. Then with that quickness of decision which was characteristic of him he determined upon a desperate expedient.

Reining in his horse he approached the Canadians at a walk as if he meant to surrender, whereby they were thrown off their guard. Counting upon an easy capture they dropped their guns which they had been holding in readiness to fire, and as Seth came up called out to him in jeering tones that he was their prisoner.

By way of response Seth, now within a few yards of them, clapped spurs to his horse, and drove him right into the centre of the little group.

This sudden and unexpected action took them completely by surprise. With oaths and angry exclamations they threw themselves out of the way of the horse, which ere they could recover and take aim with their guns, was many yards away galloping furiously along the road.

A scattering volley followed the fugitive, but not one of the leaden messengers touched him as he crouched over the horse's neck, and only one hit the animal, inflicting a slight wound in the hind quarter that simply served to quicken its speed.

For the rest of the way Seth did not spare his steed. Taking chances every minute of a fall that might mean the rendering of one or both of them helpless, he galloped on until at last the welcome sight of Fort Lyman gladdened his eyes, and presently he pulled up the panting creature which had borne him so well at the gate that was quickly opened to receive him.

Colonel Blanchard thanked him warmly for the warning message, and bade him stay at the fort until it would be safe for him to return to Lake George.

Immediately all possible preparations for defence were made at Fort Lyman, and full of anxiety its garrison awaited the expected attack.

But the days went by without bringing any sign of the enemy, and Seth again began to grow impatient. The confinement of the fort became irksome to his liberty-loving nature. He felt sure that there was plenty to be done at Lake George, and chafed at waiting in idleness inside the fort, where there was nothing to occupy the long hours.

Had the garrison known the reason for the non-appearance of the enemy they might not only have rested with easy minds, but might even have taken the field on their own account, as all danger of attack had passed for a time. The change of plan on the part of the French had been brought about in this way.

They had made their way through the forest until they were within three miles of Fort Lyman, and there as they halted for the night a dozen wagons came along the road from Lake George. They were in charge of mutinous drivers who had left the English camp without orders, little dreaming the punishment that waited their misconduct. Several of them were shot, two were captured, and the remainder escaped into the woods with the Indians at their heels.

The two captives on being questioned, told a very different story from the prisoner taken by the scouting party a few days previously. According to them, instead of the English having fallen back upon Albany, they were encamped in large force at Lake George.

When the Indians heard this they held a council and decided that they would not attack the fort which they thought well supplied with cannon, but they were quite willing to go against the camp at the lake.

All remonstrances went for nothing. They were not to be moved from their resolution, and Baron Dieskau had perforce to alter his plan of campaign. Now he was not only young but daring to rashness, and burning with eagerness to emulate the recent victory over Braddock. According to the reports the enemy greatly outnumbered him, but his Canadian advisers had assured him that the English colonial militia were the worst troops on the face of the earth.

"The more there are of them, the more we shall kill," he said with complacent confidence to his Canadian and Indian allies, and in the morning the order was given to leave Fort Lyman alone, and to march to the lake.

In the mean time Seth Allen, made desperate by delay, in spite of the efforts of his friends to restrain him, left the fort, and, by making a wide detour, succeeded in reaching the camp in safety, although almost every foot of the way thither had been fraught with perils.

Here he found the whole place astir, for an advance against the French was about to take place. Congratulating himself upon having arrived in time to take part in it Seth carefully examined his fighting gear, to make sure that everything was in readiness for active service.

CHAPTER III

BULLETS AND BAYONETS

By the wagoners who had managed to escape the fate which befell their companions Johnson had been warned of the proximity of the French war party, but he somehow formed a very wrong conception of its strength.

Instead of preparing to meet them with his full force his first plan was to send out two detachments of five hundred men each, one going toward Fort Lyman, and the other toward South Bay, with the object of catching the enemy in their retreat.

But Hendrick, the brave and sagacious chief of the Mohawks, expressed his dissent after the dramatic fashion of his race. Picking up a single stick he broke it easily with his hands. Then picking up several, he put them together and showed that they could not be broken thus.

Johnson was shrewd enough to take the hint, and directed that the two detachments be joined in one. Still the old savage shook his head.

"If they are to be killed," said he, "they are too many. If they are to fight, they are too few."

But the commander would make no further change, and the Indian not only ceased his objections, but mounted on a gun carriage and harangued his warriors, exhorting them to fight bravely for their friends, and to show no mercy to their enemies.

The morning was still young when the thousand men, under the command of Ephraim Williams and Colonel Whiting, marched off from the camp in quest of the French, their orders being to intercept their supposed retreat, and if possible find and destroy their canoes.

Seth Allen was with the vanguard, his pulse beating rapidly, and every nerve a-quiver, for he felt it in his bones that there would be plenty of fighting before the day ended.

"I hope the French will wait for us," he said to Elisha Halley, by whom he was walking. "Maybe if they get warning of our advance they will go back to their canoes and we have nothing to follow them with on the water."

Elisha smiled contemptuously as he replied:

"It all depends upon how many they are and what they know about our strength. If they think they outnumber us they will not fail to wait for us, but if we outnumber them they will retreat fast enough. Nevertheless I think we ought to go forward carefully. They might be lying in ambush somewhere ahead."

The Colonials certainly showed a lack of common sense and utter ignorance of strategy in their advance against the enemy, for no scouts were thrown out in front or flank. They pushed on in full security until the sharp eye of old Hendrick detected a sign of danger.

He at once gave warning, but it was too late. The dense thickets on the left suddenly blazed out a deadly fire, and the English fell by scores. The head of the column, as Dieskau afterward boasted, "was doubled up like a pack of cards." The old Mohawk chief's horse, on which he rode because he was so old and fat, was shot under him, and he himself killed with a bayonet as he tried to gain his feet.

Seth had a wonderful escape. The bullets whistled past him on either side, but left him untouched, and he returned the fire with his own gun as best he could in the midst of the fearful confusion.

Although it was his first experience of battle he felt no qualm of fear. On the contrary, all his nervousness vanished, and thinking only how he might fight to the best advantage, he loaded and fired as rapidly as possible.

Presently the voice of Ephraim Williams was heard calling upon his men to follow him to a piece of rising ground on the right, and Seth obeyed the command.

"We must rally, men, or we will all be destroyed." Williams cried as he led them up the slope.

But he had not reached half-way when there came a volley from the bushes that laid him dead. And it was followed close by a hot fire poured in on the right flank.

Then there was a panic. Many fled outright. The whole column recoiled and began to retreat. Its van became the rear, and all the force of the enemy rushed upon it, shouting and screeching.

Seth found himself entangled in a mob of terrified men who had no other thought than to get out of reach of the deadly fire of their assailants; and, although his spirit rebelled against this ignominious flight, he had no alternative than to take part in it.

Happily after a brief interval of confusion Colonel Whiting succeeded in rallying a part of Williams' regiment; and they, adopting Indian tactics, fighting behind trees, and firing and falling back by turns, were able with the aid of the Mohawks to cover the retreat.

"A very handsome retreat they made," was the testimony of Colonel Pomeroy, "and so continued until they came within about three-quarters of a mile of our camp. This was the last fire our men gave our enemies which killed great numbers of them; and they were seen to drop as pigeons."

In the alternate fighting and falling back Seth took his full share, using the tree trunks for cover as cleverly as any of the Indians, and firing and reloading his musket with all possible speed, yet aiming carefully so that his bullets might not be wasted.

The lust of battle had full possession of him. He utterly forgot himself in the deadly business of the moment, and without a quiver of nerve saw white men and red falling beside him and in front of him mortally smitten.

Again and again the leaden messengers of death passed perilously close to him, but he remained unscathed. As the fierce conflict began to slacken somewhat he observed a Colonial, who had not been quick enough in retreat, stumble and fall headlong, and the next instant a stalwart Indian, hideous with war paint, sprang out from the enemy's line and dashed toward the man tomahawk in hand.

Seth had just fired and there was no time to reload. If he would save his helpless countryman it must be by exposing himself to a like fate. Yet he did not hesitate.

Holding his heavy gun in readiness to use as a club, he sprang from behind the tree-trunk which had sheltered him and rushed into the zone of fire.

His action was redeemed from utter recklessness by the heroic impulse which inspired it, and to the credit of the French be it said that they forebore to fire upon him, leaving it to the Indian to deal with him first, and then accomplish what he had set out to do.

The Iroquois, when he saw the youth coming at him, gave a grunt of contempt and raised his tomahawk menacingly. But Seth kept right on until he had got within striking distance, when whirling his gun around his head he aimed a terrible blow at his opponent.

The latter sprang aside to evade it, and as he did so his foot caught in a hidden root and he fell forward on his knees. Ere he could recover himself the butt of Seth's musket took him in the back of the head, and over he went like a log, the tomahawk flying from his nerveless grasp.

While this was happening, the fallen colonial had got to his feet again and was looking about in a bewildered way, having lost his bearings and not knowing in which direction to continue the flight interrupted by his fall.

"Here, come with me," cried Seth, grasping his arm. "Bend as low as you can and run for your life."

The fellow obeyed instantly and the two of them made all haste back to their own lines, followed by a volley from the enemy which happily, however, did neither of them any harm.

Seth's gallant feat won the admiration of all who beheld it, and the profound gratitude of the man to whom he had rendered such timely succor, and who proved to be from his own province.

When Dieskau saw that the English had really rallied, and were returning the fire of his men with deadly effect, he ordered a halt and had the trumpet sounded to collect his scattered men, with the purpose of pressing forward in good order so as to make the most of the advantage already gained.

Had he been able to do so he could hardly have failed to gain a complete victory over Johnson, but fortunately for the latter, the Iroquois, who had lost many of their braves, became sullen and unmanageable, and the French Canadians, whose veteran leader, Legardeur de St. Pierre, had been killed, showed signs of wavering, and it was not until after considerable delay that the advance was made with the regulars leading the way.

Meantime in Johnson's camp there had been great anxiety and no little confusion. About an hour after Williams had marched out with his thousand men the sound of heavy firing was heard in the distance, and as it grew nearer and louder those in the camp realized that their comrades, instead of pursuing a flying foe, were themselves in retreat.

Johnson at once set about preparations for defence which should have been made long before. A barricade constructed of wagons, inverted bateaux, and tree trunks was hurriedly made along the front of the camp, and three cannons were planted so as to sweep the road, while a fourth was dragged up to the ridge of the hill.

In the midst of this confusion the defeated party began to come in. First, scared fugitives, both white and red; then gangs of men bringing the wounded, and finally the main body marching in good order down the road. Among these was Seth, very much out of humor at having to turn his back on the enemy, and hoping in his heart that they would have the courage to attack the camp.

"If we hadn't been such fools as to walk right into the trap they laid for us," he said to the man he had rescued as they marched together, "we'd not be running from them now, but they'd be running from us, and thinking only how far it was to Crown Point."

"You're just right," emphatically responded the other, whose name was John Wilcox. "There ought to have been scouts ahead of us to give us warning. I don't know what our colonel was thinking about when he let us go on like that, as if there were no French within twenty miles of us."

But of course it is always easy to be wise after the event, and now that the blunder had been committed, and had cost so dearly, it only remained to make the best of what was certainly a very serious situation.

Accordingly five hundred men were detailed to guard the flanks of the camp, while the remainder took up their position behind the wagons, or lay flat behind the logs and upturned bateaux, the Massachusetts men being on the right and the Connecticut men on the left. Not counting the Indians the actual fighting force numbered about seventeen hundred, the majority of them being rustics, who had never been under fire until that morning.

They were hardly settled at their posts when Seth's keen eyes caught the flash of bayonets through the boughs, and a minute later the white-coated regulars of France came into view, marching steadily down the road in serried array. At the same time a terrific burst of war-whoops rose on either side of them, and in the words of Pomeroy to his wife, "the Canadians and Indians helter-skelter, the woods full of them, came running with undaunted courage right clown the hill upon us, expecting to make us flee."

But in this they were greatly mistaken, for although some of the Colonials grew uneasy, their officers, sword in hand, threatened instant death to any who should attempt to leave their posts, and not one of them made a move.

Seth could not help admiring the steadiness shown by the regulars in their advance. Dieskau certainly had them well in hand, but the rest of his force, both red and white, scattered through the woods shouting, whooping, and firing from behind trees.

Well was it indeed for the English that their opponents as a whole did not display the same good discipline as the French, for had they done so the result would have been disastrous; but when only the regulars obeyed orders their attack lost much of its force and gave Captain Eyre, who commanded the artillery, a chance to open upon them with grape, which he did so effectually as to break up their orderly array and compel them to take to cover.

The firing on both sides now became general, and soon waxed so furious that to quote again Pomeroy's graphic words, "The hail stones from heaven were never much thicker than the bullets," yet, as he proudly added, "Blessed be God, that did not in the least daunt or disturb us."

Seth's position was on the right flank, and as Dieskau first directed his attack against the left and centre, he was for a time simply a spectator of the struggle.

But when the commander of the French found he was being so stoutly withstood, he turned his attention to the right and tried to force it.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Seth in a tone of satisfaction, "it is our turn now. We will give them all they want."

CHAPTER IV

THE DEFEAT OF DIESKAU

The men from Massachusetts showed no more sign of giving back before the enemy than had their brethren from the sister provinces. Loading and firing as quickly as their old-fashioned muskets allowed, they poured so deadly a fire into the French ranks that the latter could make no material advance, but were compelled to keep behind cover, and return the fire as best they might.

The conflict had continued in this fashion for nearly an hour with considerable loss of life on both sides, but without definite advantage, when Seth, becoming convinced that an officer in rich uniform, whom he could see at the centre of the French line, was their commander, determined to try if he could not shoot him down, as he reasoned that this would put them in a panic.

So, despite the protests of his companions, to whom alone he revealed his design, he crept through the barricade and began to crawl nearer the enemy. It was an extremely dangerous, not to say reckless proceeding, and those of his own party who observed it considered him as good as lost. Colonel Williams indeed shouted after him:

"Come back there, young man, you're going to your death!"

But, carried away by his great purpose, Seth paid no heed to the command. There was a big tree whose wide-spreading roots offered excellent cover about fifty yards ahead of him, and it was for this he was making, as if he reached it unharmed, he could thence get good aim at the officer he had in mind.

Lying flat on his stomach, he wriggled on slowly, yet steadily. It was as difficult work as it was dangerous, and demanded all his young strength. At any moment he might be perceived by an Iroquois or Canadian, who would make a quick dash forward and despatch him as he lay upon the ground. More than once a random bullet struck the turf uncomfortably near him.

Yet with grim determination he kept on, and at last, when nearly spent with the exertion, reached the roots of the big tree, and curled himself up there into the smallest possible space until his nerves should get steady.

Then with the utmost caution he peered out in quest of the officer.

"Good!" he exclaimed exultantly as he quickly withdrew his head. "He's there still, and I'll have him as sure as my name is Seth Allen."

Resting the gun upon the root and taking aim with the utmost care he pulled the trigger.

But just as he did so Baron Dieskau, for Seth had guessed rightly, made a sudden movement, and the bullet went by him harmlessly.

"Botheration!" growled Seth. "Why couldn't he keep still?" and he hastened to reload.

Warned by the whirr of the bullet, Dieskau stepped behind a tree and remained there for some time, while Seth, chagrined at the result of his first shot, impatiently awaited another chance.

It came a little later when the Baron, angered by the persistent disobedience to command of the Indians and Canadians, forgot his own safety and sprang out from cover to give an order to the regulars, who were fast falling into confusion under the well-directed fire of the English.

"Now then, sir," said Seth, as though he were speaking to his intended victim, "I'll have you this time," and he fired.

As the report rang out, Baron Dieskau staggered and fell to the ground, and Seth was for the moment tempted to spring to his feet and wave his cap triumphantly.

But he held himself in check, and again loaded his musket. The officer had fallen indeed, but he might not be killed, and another shot might be necessary to dispose of him. That this was the case presently became clear, for another officer came galloping to the aid of the wounded one, and Seth, moved by his unselfish devotion, forebore to fire.

But some of his companions were not so considerate, and while the adjutant was attending to the wound from Seth's bullet, the unfortunate commander was again hit in the knee and thigh.

The adjutant, who himself had been wounded, then called for the Canadians to carry Baron Dieskau to the rear, but on seeing this Seth exclaimed:

"Oh, no! You're not going to escape. You must be taken prisoner," and fired at one of the Canadians, bringing him to the ground, and causing the other to seek safety in flight.

The commander thereupon ordered the adjutant to leave him where he lay and to lead the regulars in a last effort against the English camp.

But it was now too late. Johnson's men, singly or in small squads, were already leaping over their barricade and falling upon their antagonists with their hatchets and the butts of their guns. The French and their allies alike fled before the fierce onslaught, and their sorely wounded yet dauntless commander was again shot before he fell into the hands of those who, realizing who he was, carried him off to Johnson, who had himself been wounded earlier in the day.

It was late in the afternoon when the final rout took place, and all through that night the shattered French force continued its flight through the forest, reaching their canoes the following day in a deplorable condition, for they had left their knapsacks behind, and were spent with fatigue and famine.

Great were the rejoicings in the English camp. The Colonials felt as proud of themselves as if they had already accomplished all that which they had set out to do, and their commander was so pleased that he was in no hurry to make a further move. He was content to hold his own position, which he proceeded to strengthen by making a solid breastwork around the camp and building a fort on a rising ground by the lake.

But this was just where he erred. He should have followed up his success with the utmost promptitude, and had he done so it is altogether probable that Ticonderoga, if not, indeed, Crown Point, could have been taken from the enemy.

The men from Massachusetts were eager to push on, and Seth, who had by no means got his fill of fighting, would not have hesitated to tell General Johnson in plain language what in his opinion ought to be done, but as the great man was confined to his tent by his wound, and could not even attend the councils of war that were held, leaving them to Colonel Lyman, who was second in command, he had to content himself by speaking out his mind in camp, which he did with decided frankness and force.

Then followed a miserable period of inaction that came near sickening Seth of the whole business. Although reinforcements arrived until by October there were some thirty-six hundred men in the camp, after various prolonged councils it was decided to be unwise to proceed against the French. Yet the little army lay more than a month longer at the lake, while the discontent and disgust of the men increased daily under the rains, frosts, and snows of a dreary November, until at last some of them, throwing off all discipline, went away in squads without any pretence of asking leave.

Seth's companion was one of these, and he strove hard to persuade the young fellow to join him. But Seth resolutely refused.

"No, I'll stay right here," he replied, with a touch of temper in his tone. "And you ought to do the same. We're not done with the French. If we don't go against them, they'll be sure to come back, and then there'll be need of us all."

"Oh! as for that," responded Wilcox, "they'll not be back before spring, and we can get here first easily enough, and be ready to meet them."

But Seth was not to be tempted. He let Wilcox and others go away, and when at last it was decided that the forts should be garrisoned by a certain number of men from each province, and that the rest of the army should be permitted to return to their homes, he promptly offered himself for garrison duty.

It would probably be dull, dreary work, but he preferred it to going back to what had once been his happy home, but now fraught with such harrowing associations, and so he settled down to the monotonous routine of helping to keep guard at the hastily built and by no means impregnable fort.

As the days dragged by almost without incident, Seth again grew restless, and set himself to consider how he might find some diversion. By this time winter had fully set in, and the basin of the lake was covered with ice. Seth was a strong and expert skater, and whiled away many an afternoon speeding over the glassy surface or working out figures upon it.

In this amusement several others of the little garrison joined him, and one in particular, Reuben Thayer, from Connecticut, made the exercise more interesting by rivalling Seth in feats of skill and speed.

These two quite outshone their companions, and this served as a bond of friendship between them, neither being at all jealous of the other's proficiency.

One bright, clear day, when the ice was in superb condition, a daring design flashed into Seth's mind, which he made haste to share with his friend.

"How would you like to take a good long skate, Reuben?" he asked in a significant tone, which caused the other to guess that the question had a purpose behind it.

Reuben gave him a searching glance as he replied:

"That depends. Which way were you thinking of going?"

Seth paused long enough before answering to give special emphasis to his words, although he took care to utter them in a tone of well-feigned carelessness.

"Oh, up north! There's nothing to see at this end of the lake."

A smile of intelligence broke over Reuben's homely countenance. The answer was just what he expected, and he was quite ready to share its spirit.

"How far north might you be thinking of going, Seth?" he inquired.

"Until it seems best to turn back, if we don't want to stay there for good," responded Seth, returning the smile of comprehension.

"Very good. I'm willing to go with you. Shall we ask any of the others to join us?"

"No, Reuben, I think we'd better not. If anything happens, we'll have only ourselves to think about, and none of the rest can skate alongside of us anyway."

In saying this Seth was not making a mere empty boast, for in truth both he and Reuben could easily distance anybody else in the garrison.

So the two friends made it up between them that they would vary the monotony of their lives by undertaking the perilous enterprise of a scout on skates in the direction of Crown Point.

CHAPTER V

OFF ON A SCOUT

When Seth communicated his design to the commander of the fort, the latter at first made fun of him. Then, finding he was in thorough earnest, sought to dissuade him from it; but at last, realizing the seriousness of the young fellow's purpose, and coming to think that, after all, he might carry it through successfully and gain some valuable information, he consented to him and Reuben making the venture.

They set out in the early morning of a December day, each having a blanket and a knapsack, containing four days' provisions, strapped on his back, and the rest of the garrison gave them a cheer as they glided away northward.

They were both in high spirits, for the restraint of garrison life had become very wearisome, and the outing they had now started upon was very much to their mind, despite its probability of peril.

"I wonder will any of the French be thinking of the same thing," said Seth as with strong steady strokes they sped over the glistening ice. "Their Canadians must be good skaters even if they're not themselves, and you'd think they'd be curious to know what we've been doing since we sent them back so much sadder and wiser than they came."

"We must keep a sharp lookout for them," answered Reuben, "for we certainly don't want to get into any such trap as our fellows did at first in the fight when they walked right into the ambush the French had laid for us."

"No, indeed," responded Seth emphatically. "They mustn't catch us like that, and, what's more, they're not going to."

All through the morning they skated on at their ease, because there was not the slightest chance of any of the enemy being below the Narrows, which they had fixed upon as the limit of that day's advance.

At noon they halted for dinner and a good rest. They could have only a cold bite, for it would not have been wise to light a fire; but they munched their meat and biscuits contentedly, and quenched their thirst at a hole cut in the ice.

While they lay curled up in their blankets in a sheltered nook several deer came out of the forest near by, and their hunter's instinct was at once aroused.

"What a splendid shot!" murmured Reuben under his breath as his hand went out toward his gun. "Just see that fine buck!"

"Not for your life!" exclaimed Seth in so emphatic a tone that it reached the acute ears of the deer, and they bounded away out of danger. "When we do fire, it must be at another kind of game," he added, and Reuben meekly accepted the reproof.

When refreshed and rested, they set off again, and skated pretty steadily through the afternoon, reaching the Narrows on the early dusk of the winter's day.

Although not a very cold night, it was cheerless enough without a fire; but they were both so tired that they soon fell asleep, and forgot all the discomforts of their situation.

Between the Narrows and Ticonderoga spread the broadest part of the lake, and it behooved them to be very wary in their further advance lest they should be discovered by hostile scouts venturing southward. Accordingly the following day they closely skirted the eastern border, holding themselves ready to dodge ashore and seek concealment in the forest, or to dart out toward the centre of the lake according as danger might threaten from either direction.

Several times, as they eagerly scanned the country ahead, they thought they caught a glimpse of figures moving through the trees; but it always proved to be a false alarm, or nothing more to be feared than, perhaps, a deer slipping silently out of sight.

Once they saw a big bear that they might easily have shot had they been out for that purpose, and Reuben quite grudged having to let him go in peace, for he had particularly fine fur.

The farther north they pushed the more cautious they must needs be, and it was a positive relief to both when the shadows of night again fell around them without any appearance of their foes.

"We must be pretty close to the fort now," said Seth as, having sought out the snuggest spot within reach, they settled down to spend another fireless night wrapped up in their blankets. "There don't seem to be any of their scouts moving round. I wonder what they find to do with themselves? I guess it's about as tiresome up there as it is down with us."

"You may be sure it is," replied Reuben. "This garrison duty is dull work for everybody. I'll be very glad when the winter's over, and things get moving again. What are you thinking of doing in the morning, Seth?"

"Well, I just want to get a good look at Fort Ticonderoga, and if possible find out how big a garrison they have there," Seth answered, and then after a little pause he added: "If it be that the French have left only a handful of men in charge, it might be worth while our fellows coming up on their skates and attacking the place."

Reuben gave a whistle of mingled surprise and admiration at the audacity of the idea.

"You'd want to know right well just how many there are in the fort, wouldn't you?" he suggested.

"Yes, of course I would, and that's exactly what we must do our best to find out to-morrow morning."

The programme for the next day having thus been made clear, they talked together about other things until they fell asleep.

At dawn they were astir, and now they must no longer trust to their skates, but make their way overland with utmost caution, lest at any moment a Canadian scout or Iroquois brave should be upon them from behind a tree.

Seth had only a general idea of the position of that fort and its relation to the surrounding country; but he was a scout by instinct, and Reuben followed him with admiration and implicit obedience as he skilfully made his way through the thick forest, his object being to reach an elevation from which he could command a clear view of Ticonderoga.

Advancing slowly and with many detours the two daring youths at last accomplished their purpose without their presence being discovered or suspected by the enemy, shortly before mid-day gaining a point of view that was precisely what they sought.

They were on the high bluffs immediately opposite Ticonderoga, from which they were separated only by a narrow stretch of water, and, while keeping themselves perfectly concealed among the trees, they could see everything that was going on in and around the fort.

"This is fine!" exclaimed Seth gleefully as he lay flat on the ground and fixed his gaze upon the enemy's stronghold. "What would they think if they knew that we were up here watching them? I reckon they'd send a party after us pretty quick."

"That they would," said Reuben, with a pretence of a shiver, for he was not really in any fear, "and they'd not deal any too gently with us either, would they?"

"No, sir," responded Seth. "That's not their way, but they're not going to have the chance if I can help it."

For several hours they remained in their eyrie, noting every movement at the fort, and carefully studying its position, so as to be able to give information to those at Fort William as to the chances of an attack.

They could see the garrison going about their duties, and from the number of them came to the conclusion that it would be folly to attempt an attack without a great many more men than could be spared from their own fort.

"But it wouldn't be a hard place to take if you went about it the right way and had a strong enough force, would it, Reuben?" said Seth after he had thoroughly sun-eyed the fort and its surroundings, and then he proceeded to outline a plan of attack that certainly did credit to his wits.

Reuben listened approvingly to it all, and, when he had finished, mildly asked:

"How much longer shall we stay here, Seth? We've about seen all there is to see. Had we not better be starting back?"

"To be sure we had," replied Seth, whose enthusiasm over the possibility of successfully attacking the fort had caused him to be oblivious of the flight of time. "Come along; we mustn't stay here any longer."

Just as they were about to start they saw a party set out from the fort on skates and speed away southward.

"Whew!" exclaimed Seth. "I wonder what that means. Are they going off to do a little scouting on their own account? In that case we'll have to keep a sharp lookout or we may fall into their hands."

There was certainly need for using the utmost precaution in their movements, and it was with a keener sense of danger than they had felt before that the two New Englanders began their return journey.

So long as they were concealed by the woods they were safe enough from discovery, but once they took to the ice, which they must do as soon as possible, for their provisions were running low, and would not by any means last for a long journey overland, then they ran the risk of being sighted and pursued.

But there was no help for it, and no time to be lost, so they urged their way through the forest until they reached the edge of the lake.

Then with eager eyes and fast-beating pulses they scanned the glistening surface before them. Not a living thing was in view, but at any moment from around one of the wooded points the enemy might appear.

"I wish I knew which side they're on," said Seth, the anxious expression of his countenance showing his state of mind. "The farther away we can keep from them the better chance we'll have, for I'm sure we can skate as fast or faster than any of them."

"They'll most likely be on the other side I should think," responded Reuben; "so we had better keep to this one."

This seemed reasonable enough, so they put on all speed and dashed down the lake.

The exhilarating motion restored their spirits, and confident of their ability to hold their own on skates against any of the enemy, they flew along over the smooth ice for mile after mile without encountering any cause for alarm until as they rounded a point beyond which was a deep cove, they saw something which sent their hearts into their mouths.

It was the very party whose departure from Fort Ticonderoga they had witnessed, and it consisted of six Canadians on skates, who were just starting off again after having rested for a while in the snug shelter of the cove.

They sighted the New Englanders at once, and with fierce cries, which sent a shiver through the two youths, began the chase.

Happily their guns were not ready, for since Seth and Reuben were at first within range they would of course, have fired at them, but now they had to depend upon their skill and strength as skaters to effect the capture of the daring scouts.

Straight southward darted the Colonials, their pursuers a couple of hundred yards in the rear, and following with grim determination.

Seth and Reuben, although they fully realized the seriousness of the situation, felt no very great apprehension as to the outcome. They had entire confidence in their ability to more than hold their own while on the ice, and if they were compelled to take to the land, they did not doubt but that they

could find a place of concealment until the danger was passed, or make their way through the forest with sufficient speed to distance pursuit.

The two contingencies they had to fear were that in their rapid flight one or other might trip and fall, injuring himself or his skates, or that there might be another party of the enemy lower down the lake into whose hands they would be driven by those coming after them.

Both these possibilities, so unpleasant to contemplate, had presented themselves to Seth; but they did not daunt his brave spirit, nor did he mention them to Reuben, who no doubt had his own thoughts.

The early dusk of mid-winter drew on as mile after mile of the flawless ice was covered without the pursuers making any gain. By dint of frequent spurting the New Englanders might have widened the gap, and Reuben was anxious that they should do so; but Seth thought differently.

So long as they kept out of range of the French it seemed to him best to reserve their strength and wind, for at any moment the appearance of Canadians in front might render necessary a supreme effort to evade them.

If they should be thus caught between two parties, Seth's mind was made up to fight to the last gasp, as he would rather die fighting his foe than be taken alive only to suffer death subsequently by hideous torture.

"Thank God, it's getting dark!" exclaimed Seth, breaking the silence which had lasted for some time. "If we can keep on as we are now, we'll be able to put ashore and hide ourselves among the trees."

"We can't do it any too soon to suit me," panted Reuben breathlessly, for the tremendous strain was beginning to tell upon him. "I'm tiring fast, and another couple of miles will finish me completely."

"Cheer up – cheer up, Reuben!" responded Seth, giving him an affectionate pat on the shoulder. "They're farther behind than they were, and we'll soon be able to make a dash for the woods."

CHAPTER VI

ONE OF ROGERS' RANGERS

The approach of darkness stirred the Canadians to even greater efforts than they had hitherto put forth, and after a furious spurt, which perceptibly decreased the distance between them and the fugitives, they halted for a moment to send a volley after them.

Their intentions were of the best from their point of view, but happily they might as well have saved their ammunition, for what with being all out of breath themselves and consequently unable to take steady aim, while their moving targets called for no ordinary marksmanship, the bullets went "zip, zip!" harmlessly past the New Englanders, ricocheting over the ice as if they were going on indefinitely.

Seth laughed at the vain attempt to put a stop to their flight.

"It would take better shots than they have in the French army to hit us at this distance," he said, "and those fellows aren't going to have another chance either, for we'll get out of their sight right away. Come along, Reuben, we'll take to the woods."

For some time they had been working toward shore, and now they were so near that a few more swift strokes served to bring them to land at a spot where the trees came close to the lake side.

"Here we are!" cried Seth in a tone of manifest relief. "Off with your skates now, Reuben;" and he hastily unbuckled his own.

"Right glad I am to take them off," said Reuben emphatically, "for I'm dead tired of them."

"They've been our best friends notwithstanding," responded Seth, "and we'll need them again before we get back to the fort."

Then, skates off, they dived into the thick forest, where the shadows were already deepening, and with relief beyond expression realized that they were safe from further pursuit.

The Canadians gave them a parting volley as they disappeared, and Seth, turning round, waved his cap at them derisively.

"Fooled this time!" he cried. "Try again!" And Reuben, whose spirits were restored by the passing away of immediate danger, laughed heartily at his impudence.

They had landed on the west side of the lake, and so long as there was sufficient light left for them to pick their steps with any safety, they kept on southward.

At last, however, the darkness grew too dense, and they too weary to go any farther, so they lay down to rest for the night, rejoicing at their escape, although every bone and muscle ached with fatigue.

They were not disturbed in their slumbers, and, quite refreshed by them, set off at dawn, keeping to the woods for a time, but afterward returning to the ice where they judged they were safe.

The rest of the return journey to the fort was free from excitement, and they had a hearty reception from their comrades, who were in considerable doubt as to whether they should ever see them again.

The commander was greatly pleased at their exploit and at the information they brought back concerning what the French were doing at Ticonderoga.

"They are no doubt going to make a very strong place of it, and the longer they are left undisturbed the harder it will be to take it," he said. "I must send word to General Johnson and urge him to make an attack if possible before the winter is over."

Seth's countenance lighted up at these words. From what he had seen, he had no doubt that with a moderately strong force the new stronghold could be captured with all its garrison, and he keenly relished the prospect of having a share in the enterprise.

But nothing was done after all, and the days dragged by as dully as before, until there appeared upon the scene one morning a man with whom Seth was henceforth to be very closely associated, and through whom he was to find the fullest outlet for his adventurous spirit.

This was Robert Rogers, of New Hampshire, one of the most remarkable and picturesque personalities of his time, who rendered splendid service to the English in his own romantic way.

His career had been a strange one. His boyhood was spent amid the rough surroundings of a frontier village. Growing to manhood, he engaged in some occupation which led him to frequent journeyings in the wilderness between the French and English settlements, and these gave him a good knowledge of both. It also taught him to speak French. Just what the mysterious business was is not precisely known, but in all probability it was a smuggling trade with Canada, the dangers and profits of which alike attracted his daring spirit.

For some time previous to his appearance at Fort William Henry he had been actively employed on a series of excursions into the enemy's territory, which he had conducted with such extraordinary skill and uniform success as to earn for himself a great reputation, and Rogers' Rangers, as his men, chiefly New Hampshire borderers, were called, had come to be more feared by the French than any other part of the provincial force.

Seth had heard so much about him that he had become a veritable hero in his mind, and he had quite determined at the first opportunity to offer himself as a recruit to his company.

His joy may be readily imagined, therefore, when the dull routine of the day was broken in upon by the unexpected approach of a band of men whose whole appearance was so striking that he at once realized that they were no other than the famous Rogers' Rangers.

"Look, Reuben!" he cried to his friend as they stood together on the rude ramparts, whence they had been somewhat disconsolately gazing toward the lake, and wishing that some French or Indians would come into sight by way of variety. "See what's coming; I am sure that's Rogers and his Rangers. How glad I am! I've been waiting to see them this long time!"

The party comprised not more than fifty. They wore a curious sort of woodland uniform appropriate to their methods of operation, and their well-tanned countenances showed plainly enough how much of their life was spent away from the shelter of a roof.

"Fine-looking fellows, aren't they?" Seth exclaimed admiringly, as the newcomers passed through the gate of the fort with quick, steady step, and then came to a halt before the commander, while their leader stepped forward to pay his respects and present his communication.

Major Rogers certainly was a man who could not fail to command attention in any company. In figure he was tall and well knit, every movement manifesting strength and agile ease. With the exception of his nose, which, as is often the case in people of particularly vigorous character, was disproportionately big, his features were good, and he had a clear, bold eye, that expressed his daring spirit, while it took in everything within the range of vision.

Ambitious and determined, by no means uneducated, and so skilled in wood-craft as to be a match for the subtlest Indian, he possessed every qualification for the especially perilous but important work he had entered into so heartily, and there was not a part of the provincial force which could have been less easily done without than his battalion of Rangers.

Great was the satisfaction at Fort William when Major Rogers announced that he had come by the orders of General Johnson to take up his quarters there for the present and to devote, himself to the task of keeping as close a watch as possible upon the operations of the enemy at Ticonderoga and Crown Point.

From Commander Glasier down every member of the garrison did his best to show his hospitality, and they indulged in a general carouse that night which would have given the French a fine opportunity to storm the fort if they had only been aware of the condition of their foes.

Seth lost no time in making up to Major Rogers. It was not his way to let the grass grow under his feet, and accordingly the first chance he saw of a word with the great man alone he seized the opportunity.

Now it happened that the occasion was not an altogether propitious one, because the major, having drunk rather deeply the previous night, and told stories, and sung songs until the small hours, as a natural consequence felt somewhat out of sorts – in fact, like a bear with a sore head.

Consequently when Seth, approaching him, said in a modest enough tone:

"I am Seth Allen from Massachusetts, sir, and I would like to speak with you for a few moments."

The Major, fixing upon him his penetrating glance, and seeing what a mere youth he was despite his stalwart frame, replied gruffly:

"Well, young man, and what do you want of me?"

The manifest ill-humor of the tone brought the color to Seth's cheeks; but he was not to be checked by it, and he came at once to the point by responding:

"I want to join your Rangers, sir."

The famous scout looked him over from head to foot and then broke into a laugh that was so clearly contemptuous as to make Seth thrill with indignation, although he strove not to show it in his countenance.

"You want to join my Rangers, eh? And what good would such a youngster as you be to me? I want only men who can stand anything and are not afraid of anything."

Seth was too eager to gain his end to allow his temper to stand in his way, and so keeping himself under control he asked quietly:

"May I tell you what I did last month?"

There was something so firm yet respectful in his tone and prepossessing in his appearance that the Major began to relent a little, and to feel that he was hardly giving the young fellow fair treatment, so in a much milder way he answered:

"Very well, I'll listen. Come over here and we'll sit down," and he led the way to a sheltered corner of the fort.

When they were seated, Seth told about his scouting expedition with Reuben and what they had observed, and then, encouraged by the attention with which his narration was received, went on to express his own views as to what might be done if only the provincial authorities would act quickly and not wait until the French had made their position so strong that it would be out of the question to overcome them.

As he talked in his simple, frank way, Rogers was studying intently not only his face but his form, and from the different expression which gradually stole over his strong, stern features, it might be judged that he was being moved to change his mind concerning the speaker.

He listened in silence save for an occasional sharp query that went to the mark like a well-aimed arrow, and when Seth had finished seemed to be lost in reflection for so long a space that Seth began to get apprehensive as to the result of the interview.

At length, fixing his piercing eyes upon the New Englander, he asked him in a voice so deep that it sounded hardly human:

"Is everything you have just told me the simple truth, or have you made up some of it?"

The flush deepened upon Seth's cheek and mounted to the roots of his hair. For one whose nature was so perfectly straightforward to be suspected of falsehood could not fail to hurt, and it made him wince; but he did his best to hide the fact, yet his tone was not altogether free from a touch of feeling as he replied:

"The simple truth, sir. I have made up nothing."

"Then, young man, you'll do!" exclaimed Rogers, with a sudden energy that made him start. "You're just what I want for my Rangers." And so saying, he gave him a heavy clap on the back with his big hand by way of emphasizing his decision.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Seth, springing to his feet, and fairly dancing in his delight. "I'm sick to death of poking about this fort doing nothing."

"Well, I reckon you won't have much chance to complain of that while you work for me," said Rogers dryly, and thus the matter was settled.

Seth's outfit of weapons was so complete that it needed no additions, and his dress required but little alteration to make it sufficiently similar to that of the Rangers.

His reception by his new associates was not unanimously cordial. Some of the older ones rather resented his being so young, and did not hesitate to find fault with the Major's judgment; but other were more kindly disposed, and made Seth welcome in their own hearty fashion.

The coming of the Rangers and the thrilling stories they had to tell of their perilous experiences proved a great boon to the garrison, and they were in no hurry to have them set off again. They were consequently well pleased when it was decided that the Rangers should make Fort William Henry their headquarters for the present.

No sooner had he been made a Ranger than Seth began to long for an outing with them, but it was not until the middle of January that the opportunity came.

Then to his joy Major Rogers selected him as one of a party of seventeen to reconnoitre the French forts.

They set out on skates, and made such good speed that ere night fell they had reached the part of the lake where it narrows greatly before joining its waters with those of Lake Champlain.

Here they halted for some hours in order to rest and eat, and then, in spite of the darkness, which troubled them little, for they seemed to be able to find their way through it without difficulty, they made a detour around Fort Ticonderoga, and went into ambush by the forest road connecting it with Crown Point.

Here with guns ready for instant use they waited to see what might pass along the road.

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