

The Epic Battles for Ticonderoga

1758

William R. Nester



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WILLIAM R. NESTER

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*For Angela,
with the deepest love*

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INTRODUCTION



“Like Chaff before the Wind”

*O my God, make them like whirling dust and like chaff before the wind. . . .
Drive them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. . . . Fill their
faces with shame . . . let them perish in disgrace.*

—Psalm 83

Ticonderoga is among North America’s most visually and historically haunting places. Named after a corrupted Mohawk word that may mean “great carrying place” or “land between the two great waters,” Ticonderoga is a small peninsula and the surrounding area where the La Chute River joins the southern tip of Lake Champlain in northern New York.¹ A fort has dominated those narrows since 1755. The vista from Fort Ticonderoga’s stone ramparts is stunning, with the lake running north and south, forested hills on either flank, and mountain ranges looming in the distance.

Yet while viewing that sweeping beauty, one is haunted by the knowledge that one is standing on hallowed ground. Thousands of men died trying to take or defend that patch of land. It was so strategic that it was widely believed to be the “key to a continent” during both the conflict known as the French and Indian War and then during the American Revolution.

On August 21, 1758, the fort, then called Carillon, was the scene of an especially poignant ceremony. Massed in silent contemplation within a horseshoe-shaped breastwork on a low plateau a half mile inland from the fort were 3,528 French regulars, 2,671 Canadian marines and militia, and 470 Indians of numerous tribes. Standing before them were their commander, General Louis Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm Gozon de Saint Veran and Father Francois Picquet. A large wooden



Map 1: Overview Map

cross towered behind the barricade. A Te Deum or Catholic hymn of thanksgiving was about to begin.²

Seven weeks earlier most of those men had lined the hastily constructed breastworks and for hours steadily loaded, leveled, and fired their muskets at charge after desperate charge of British regular and provincial infantry. That battle's stakes could not have been higher. The French army had its back to Lake Champlain. The British outnumbered the French four to one. If the British broke through they would have bagged three of every five defenders of New France between Fort Carillon and Montreal, one hundred and fifty miles north. If vigorously led, that British army could then have overwhelmed any French forces in its way to Canada. Within a month that army would have marched into Montreal and not long after into Quebec. Canada's eventual conquest

would have been spared two years of vicious fighting and heaps of dead and maimed. The battle of Fort Carillon would have been the decisive turning point in the French and Indian War.

But that was not to be. When the gunsmoke finally cleared on July 8, nearly two thousand British troops lay dead or wounded before the French breastworks. The British commander, Major General James Abercromby, who had ordered those attacks, now ordered his army to retreat. The survivors streamed to safety along the two-and-a-half-mile road from Fort Carillon to Lake George. The retreat did not end there. The following day they packed into over one thousand boats and rowed thirty-two miles up Lake George to its narrow southern shore.³ Upon disembarking, the general dispersed his regiments in camps from there to Albany. Though it was midsummer, Abercromby's campaign against Canada was over. The end of his military career in North America would follow, after Prime Minister William Pitt learned of his blood-soaked wilderness debacle.

During Father Picquet's mass for the victorious French forces, he cited the 83rd Psalm, which invokes God's help to sweep away the enemy in future battles: "O my God, make them like whirling dust and like chaff before the wind. Drive them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm . . . Fill their faces with shame . . . let them perish in disgrace." He profusely thanked God for His divine aid when the French had "conquered and put to flight" the British army in the battle before Fort Carillon.⁴

Setting aside the issue of God's presence, Father Picquet was only half right. Fort Carillon's valiant defenders may have routed the British army, but they had hardly conquered their enemy. France was incapable of doing that in North America. With New France's settlers outnumbered twenty to one by their restless and aggressive British neighbors, at best French forces could merely stave off a likely inevitable defeat. Significant as it was, that is all the battle of Fort Carillon accomplished.

By inflicting such a bloody disaster on the British, the French threatened to stalemate this latest frontier war in North America, just as they had stalemated four previous conflicts. This most recent war had erupted four years earlier, on May 28, 1754. On that date, troops led by Lieutenant Colonel George Washington opened fire on those led by Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville in disputed territory in the upper Ohio river valley. Though what exactly happened that day remains hazy, the source of their conflict is clear.

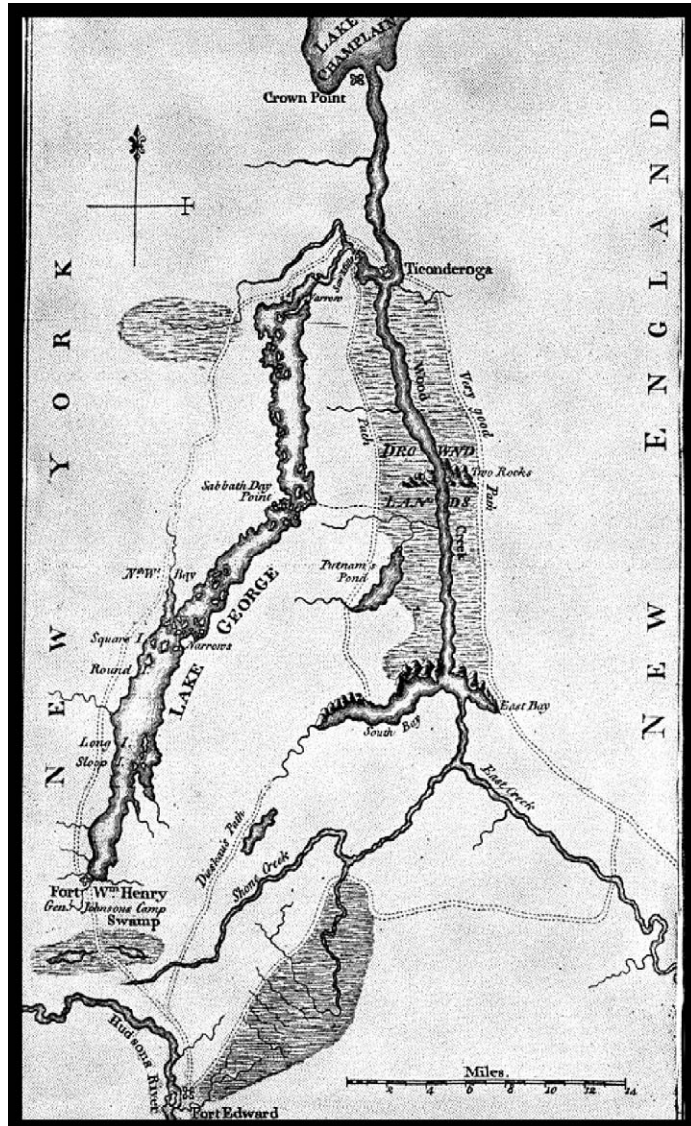
Over the previous century and a half, France and Britain had carved ever-larger empires from North America's wilderness. Those empires

now ground against each other at numerous strategic flash points. A long frontier stretched between them, from the Chignecto Isthmus of Acadia to the Creek villages of Georgia. In 1754, the most hotly contested region was that surrounding the forks of the Ohio River, where the British and French each raced to build a fort that would bar the other and cow the local Indian tribes into allegiance and trade. A small British force won that race, but within weeks it surrendered to a superior French and Indian army. Four years of bloody warfare would pass before the British retook that fort.

Although two campaigns would subsequently be launched for the Ohio forks, the most sustained fighting, as in previous wars, would blaze along the shortest corridor through the mountains between the two empires—that linking Albany and Montreal. It was little more than a couple of hundred miles as the crow flies from Montreal dead south to Albany; it was a little longer if that proverbial bird perched upon a canoe paddled by one of the many smugglers that plied the route between the two towns. The Richelieu River flows into the St. Lawrence River below Montreal. A skilled canoeist could paddle up the Richelieu, portage around the rapids at Fort Chambly, and continue south upstream until the river flows out of Lake Champlain. He could then follow Lake Champlain for roughly a hundred miles until he reached the narrows at the La Chute River mouth—the area the Indians called Ticonderoga.

From there the voyageur could choose between two routes. The less difficult route led south on Lake Champlain and then along Wood Creek until it shallowed near Fort Anne. There the canoeist would face a ten-mile portage to the Hudson River and then a forty-five-mile paddle south to Albany. But if the canoeist really wanted a challenge, he could head up the two-and-a-half-mile-long La Chute River (portaging around its five falls), and then dig his paddle deep until he emerged into Lake George, called Lac Sacrament by the French. It took two days to paddle to Lake George's south end, with the magnificent lake flanked by mountains on both sides and dotted with scores of wooded islands. Fourteen miles of tangled forest then lay ahead for the traveler, between Lake George's southern shoreline and the Hudson River.

In 1755, Colonel William Johnson chose the tougher route for his two-thousand-man army, composed solely of American provincials, to move toward Montreal. A flotilla launched on Lake George was usually well beyond musket shot of either shore. In contrast, a traveler on Wood Creek must constantly peer into the thick forest to avoid ambush.



Map 2: Fort Edward to Fort St. Frederic (Crown Point)

Johnson ordered his troops to build what became known as Fort Edward a mile below where the Hudson, flowing from the west, angles south. There he had his men hack a road along an Indian trail leading to Lake George. At the shore, the troops would begin massing supplies and building boats for the campaign north.

When he got word of Johnson's advance, New France's Governor-General Pierre-François de Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnal, ordered his field commander, Major General Jean-Armand, Baron de Dieskau, to move swiftly and attack the enemy. Dieskau led his 3,500 men to Fort St. Frederic, paused briefly, and then continued a dozen miles to Ticonderoga, where he encamped two-thirds of them, and continued on with 216 grenadiers, 684 Canadians, and 600 Indians. On September 7, Dieskau and his men had reached the road linking Fort Edward and Johnson's camp (later called Fort William Henry), on Lake George. Dieskau reluctantly went along with his Indians, who were insistent on attacking the 1,300 troops at the Lake George camp, rather than the 500 at Fort Edward on the Hudson. The result was a disaster. In three distinct battles on September 8, the American provincial army defeated the French; Dieskau was wounded and captured.

After debating whether or not to follow up their victory, Johnson and his officers agreed that the season was too late to advance against Fort St. Frederic. Word of Dieskau's defeat prompted Governor Vaudreuil to dispatch Lieutenant Michel Chartier de Lotbiniere, Marquis de Lotbiniere, to Ticonderoga with orders to construct what became known as Fort Carillon.

From 1755 until the summer of 1757, neither side launched an offensive on the Lake George front. Instead, large raiding parties would slip by water or forest between Forts William Henry and Carillon to attack the other's supply convoys, patrols, or woodcutters. But in July 1757, Dieskau's successor, General Montcalm, led 2,570 soldiers, 542 marines, 2,946 Canadians, and 1,799 Indians down Lake George against Fort William Henry. After a nine-day siege—popularized by James Fenimore Cooper's nineteenth-century novel *The Last of the Mohicans*—the fort's commander reluctantly surrendered. Lieutenant Colonel George Monro accepted Montcalm's terms that he give up the fort and march away with the pledge that his 1,500 troops would not fight again for the war's duration. Rather than push on to attack Fort Edward, Montcalm ordered Fort William Henry destroyed and its supplies hauled back to Fort Carillon.

Fort William Henry's destruction hardly ended the fighting around Lake George. British and French forces continued to launch raids against each other along both the Wood Creek and Lake George corridors between Forts Carillon and Edward. Then in the spring of 1758, the latest British commander of His Majesty's forces in North America, Major General James Abercromby, received orders to lead an army

against Forts Carillon and St. Frederic, and ideally on to Montreal. Abercromby's campaign was one of three planned for that year. Other British armies would attack Forts Louisbourg and Duquesne. It was hoped that 1758 would provide the war's turning point.

It did. The other British campaigns succeeded in capturing Forts Louisbourg and Duquesne, as well as destroying Fort Frontenac. After four years of stalemate the British could take heart that victory was within their grasp. In what had become the world's first global war, the fighting that had erupted at the forks of the Ohio river region had spread beyond North America to much of Europe, the Caribbean, parts of West Africa, Argentina, India, and the Philippines, and across the adjoining seas. Though it would take two more years of hard fighting for the British to conquer Canada, from 1758 the initiative was completely theirs and victory only a matter of time.

The victories of 1758, however, were marred by a single catastrophic failure: the British attempt to capture Fort Carillon. With nearly 2,500 combined casualties, the battle of Fort Carillon was the French and Indian War's bloodiest.⁵ Surprisingly, although excellent books have been written about most of the war's major and even some of its minor battles, no book has yet provided an in-depth account of the ill-fated campaign in the New York wilderness that reached its climax in the battle before Fort Carillon.⁶

The Epic Battles for Ticonderoga, 1758 will address that gap in the literature. While technologies, tactics, ideologies, and personalities may change, the essence of battle—violence, terror, chaos, choices, misperceptions, and ambitions—remain constant throughout history. Although the events occurred nearly two and a half centuries ago, an exploration of the 1758 battles for Ticonderoga can provide a “distant mirror” that will help us better understand war at any time.

Every battle provides a unique setting in which commanders make decisions that not only determine the fate of the soldiers below them, but sometimes that of empires and the course of history. For that reason, the 1758 campaign cannot be understood without exploring the broader political, strategic, and logistical context in which the commanders and their subordinates made crucial decisions. In addition, it is sometimes as important to explore what did not happen as what did. Throughout *The Epic Battles for Ticonderoga, 1758*, the commanders' decisions will be weighed against the various options as they understood them, and the most likely scenarios had they chosen to follow a different path.

There is an additional category of challenges for those who explore that campaign and the period in which it was embedded. Researchers are rewarded with a goldmine of primary sources. Unfortunately, many of those sources must be handled with care. How the participants made sense of what was going on could be, unwittingly or not, as distorted or false as those of anyone else participating in and writing about the extraordinary events of any time and place, including, of course, here and now. Figures often do not add up even by those who should know better. Quartermasters sometimes did not get the math right in their accounts. Battle casualties are the most inconsistent. Commanders on both sides tended to downplay their own losses and exaggerate those of the enemy. And then there is spelling and grammar.

So what is an analyst to do? All along, I have tried my best to sort out fact from fancy, and explain the discrepancy. Most gaps between what people perceived and what was true are explained not as an attempt to commit fraud, but by the natural constraints on our ability as humans to understand complex, shifting realities and our tendency to engage in wishful thinking. So mostly I give the participants the benefit of the doubt, unless there is substantial evidence for a different conclusion. Varying versions of battle casualties are noted and, if possible, interpreted. I am grateful to my eagle-eyed editors for noting and correcting several columns of statistics whose inaccurate totals evaded me. As for spelling and grammar, unless a reader might be completely puzzled, most quotes are left with all the color and spice of the original.

The slaughter before Fort Carillon climaxed a year of raids and skirmishes in the surrounding forests. But while the sounds and smoke of battle drifted through the trees only intermittently, the struggle against nature was incessant. Just staying alive during a fierce northern New York winter was no easy task. Once spring weather broke and the ice melted, thousands of teamsters, laborers, and rowers filled rutted roads, waded surging rivers, and endured punishing portages to keep the troops and themselves supplied at distant forts and camps. Even more than the elements, politics determined the fate of Fort Carillon. Constant bitter political battles entangled both the French and British commands. The decisions or stalemates in those councils of war affected the grand strategy and tactics alike. Finally, there are the inner battles that each man constantly wrestles with that mold his outlook, choices, and relations with others. All these things would shape the epic battles for Ticonderoga in 1758.

CHAPTER 1



Opening Shots

I now thought it most prudent to retreat.

—Robert Rogers

Captain Rogers . . . quizzed him on the fresh meat they let him eat at Carillon.

M. Wolff answered him to be careful of himself when he comes again.

—Captain Malartic

WINTER RAIDS

By the time Robert Rogers and his troops got within a half dozen miles of Fort Carillon on March 13, 1758, they had endured three agonizing days and nights of cold and snow. By light and through hours of dark they had trudged on snowshoes up Lake George's ice toward Fort Carillon. The frigid air constantly seeped through the layers of wool capotes, blankets, caps, hunting shirts, and leggings that each man wore. Even the sun could be an enemy. Cloudless skies were usually colder and the sun's rays glaring off the snow-buried landscape was blinding. The nights were worse. Fires were forbidden. At best the men could chop down fir saplings, spread them across the snow, and shiver the dark away atop them. In addition to battling the elements, they were haunted by the constant fear that at any time musket shots and war screams would split the air—followed by a rush of hideously painted Indians brandishing tomahawks and scalping knives. Winter campaigns could rapidly break down most men physically and emotionally. Yet, when successful, they bloodied and demoralized the enemy while bringing back word of his numbers and intentions.

To minimize the chance of ambush, Rogers deployed his men in three parallel columns that marched fifty yards apart, each with advance, rear, and flank guards. Scouts ranged further ahead, from a quarter mile to several miles, depending on how well they knew the forest and the probable danger of colliding with an enemy war party. Rogers ensured that his men were equipped for the challenges ahead. In addition to adequate clothing, each man carried a musket, sixty rounds of ammunition, a hatchet, ice-creepers, snowshoes, and a haversack stuffed with rations; each dragged a sled with extra blankets and equipment. Nearly every one of his 181 troops were rangers, which comprised 11 officers, 11 sergeants, and 150 men among four companies. Joining the expedition from the 27th Inniskilling Regiment were 8 volunteers—3 officers, 3 cadets, a sergeant, and a private.¹

The American rangers, mostly born on the frontier and veterans of many a winter march, were hardened to the icy hell. All were experts at wilderness survival and combat. This was not true of the volunteers who accompanied them. No English winter could match those of upper New York in cold or snow. Many of those regulars most likely cursed themselves for embarking on what they thought would be a grand adventure to prove their virility and to boast of for years to come.

The normally intrepid Rogers was unusually cautious the closer his troops got to Fort Carillon. He was aware that word of his expedition had already reached the French. Just two weeks earlier, Fort Edward's commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Haviland of the 27th Regiment, had ordered Captain Israel Putnam to lead his Connecticut company and some ranger volunteers on a reconnaissance near Fort Carillon. Putnam received the order on February 28 and departed the following day. He and his men got within eight miles of Fort Carillon without encountering any French patrols. Learning that 600 Indians were camped near Fort Carillon, Putnam decided to return. While he and his men were heading north, a French and Indian raiding party captured the rangers' sutler, a Mr. Best, and a deserter near Fort Edward. From them they learned of Putnam's sortie and another one soon to be led by Rogers and 400 troops.

If the French and Indians were now lying in wait, they would encounter less than half the number they expected. The rangers might well be blundering into a death trap. Haunted by that grim possibility, Rogers "viewed this small detachment of brave men . . . with no little concern and uneasiness of mind."²

To lift his spirits Rogers may well have recalled his previous raid of that winter. On December 17, 1757, he led 150 rangers out of Fort Edward

for the brutal trek north toward Fort Carillon. Frostbite afflicted 8 men so badly that they had to turn back. The rest pushed on. By Christmas Eve, he and his men were huddled in the snow several hundred yards from Fort Carillon. Rogers hoped to ambush a French woodcutting party and hurry prisoners back to Fort Edward for prolonged interrogation. Late that morning they nabbed a lone sergeant who was out stretching his legs. As the day wore on, Rogers grew impatient. Around noon when a hunter headed their way, Rogers ordered a few of his men to chase him in hopes of drawing a rescue party from the fort into their ambush.

But the French stayed put. Rogers and his men could do nothing against an alerted garrison that refused to come out and fight. Instead, Fort Carillon's commander, Captain Louis-Philippe Le Dossu d'Hebecourt of La Reine battalion, ordered his gunners to fire grape-shot at the woods where the rangers had crept to snipe at the French soldiers lining the parapet. The rangers scrambled back out of range. All Rogers could do was order the fort's woodpiles torched and the cattle slaughtered. While the rangers were busy burning and butchering, the sergeant escaped. Two other Frenchmen, however, deserted to the rangers. As a parting touch, Rogers scribbled a note and tied it with a leather thong to the horn of one of the eighteen slain cattle. The note read: "I am obliged, Sir, for the repose you have allowed me to take; I thank you for the fresh meat you have sent me; I shall take care of my prisoners; I request you to present my compliments to the Marquis de Montcalm. Rogers, Commandant of the Independent Companies."³ By December 27, Rogers and his men were safely back at Fort Edward.

Upon receiving the "compliments," General Montcalm remarked with wry annoyance that Rogers was a "rogue" who "exudes maybe a bit more spirit than is necessary." The raid, and especially that message, stung French pride. It was later reported that "Rogers, a great partisan, came roving in the neighborhood of Carillon . . . He caused to be attached to one of the oxen a letter addressed to the Commandant of the fort, the contents whereof were an ill-timed and very low piece of braggadocio."⁴

Having savored that fond memory, Rogers might well have recalled another. In early 1758, French lieutenant Wolff was dispatched under a truce flag to Fort Edward with letters from New France's Governor Vaudreuil and General Montcalm to their English counterparts concerning prisoner exchanges. Wolff enjoyed the civilities he received at Fort Edward, especially the banter with his respected opponent Rogers over his latest raid: "Captain Rogers . . . quizzed him on the fresh meat they

let him eat at Carillon; M. Wolff answered him to be careful of himself when he comes again.”⁵ That warning was prescient.

FORT CARILLON

Rogers’s raid worsened a miserable winter for Fort Carillon’s garrison. With the right leaders, troops can endure and sometimes revel in the most wretched conditions. Fort Carillon’s isolated snowbound defenders lacked that vital spark of leadership. Diminishing supplies, equipment, and pursuits gnawed at the soldiers’ morale. Their swelling frustration burst into protests in November 1757, and threatened to do so again throughout that long winter. The officers not only were incapable of alleviating those complaints but may have aggravated them with their own mutterings of dissatisfaction, lethargy, and disdain.

What could be done to rejuvenate enthusiasm at that strategic post? Noncommissioned officers are any army’s backbone. They, more than anyone else, determine whether the troops’ morale will slouch or stiffen—on or off the battlefield. The army’s second in command, General François Gaston, duc de Levis, grasped that simple truth. Montcalm and Vaudreuil eagerly approved his proposal to send among the troops tough but understanding veteran noncommissioned officers. Under the pretext of escorting a munitions convoy of sledges, eight sergeants and eight corporals arrived at Fort Carillon in February and were dispersed to each company. That infusion of vigorous leaders raised the garrison’s morale on the eve of that winter’s greatest military challenge.⁶

But noncommissioned officers are not enough to wring victories from battle. In this area, too, the garrison received a boost in early 1758. A master of wilderness warfare, marine Ensign Jean-Baptiste Levrault de Langis Montegron, arrived at Fort Carillon in mid-January. Then thirty-five years old, Levrault (better known today as Langy), had led numerous raids since the war began four years earlier and had proven to be every bit as audacious and skilled a leader as Rogers.

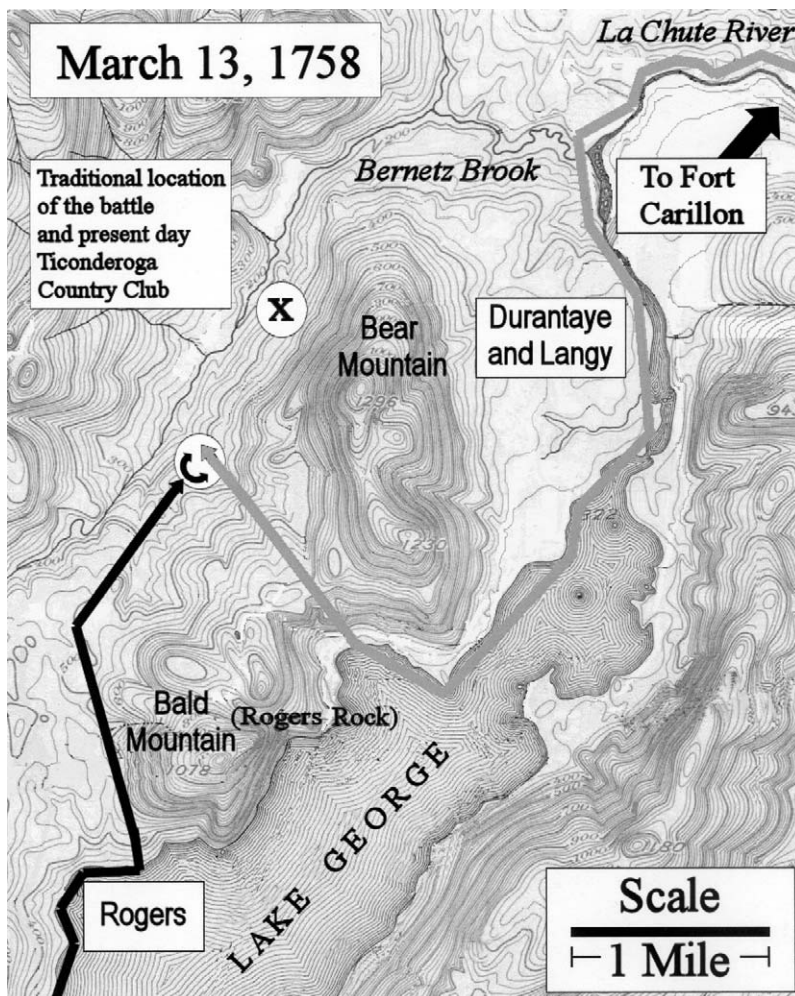
Within days Langy led a raiding party through forty-five miles of deep snows south to the trail near Fort Edward. There he ambushed a fifty-man American patrol on February 8. They killed twenty-three, and brought back five prisoners. Langy led another party out later that month which failed to find any prey. Three or four of his Indians lingered, and “fell in with a convoy of 30 sleighs loaded with provisions, which they plundered and dispersed, taking 4 scalps. They would have

had greater success had one of them not been dangerously wounded."⁷ With the infusion of dynamic leaders like Langy and the noncommissioned officers, the garrison would be ready the next time Rogers appeared at its doorstep.

THE BATTLE ON SNOWSHOES

Rogers and his troops were exhausted when they reached Lake George's north end on the morning of March 13, having trudged out of Fort Edward three days earlier. They had spent the first night at Halfway Brook, roughly six miles from Fort Edward. They hiked nearly twenty miles the second day and shivered away the night at Lake George's first narrows on the east shore. Rogers sent a scouting party three miles up the lake. The scouts returned to report no sign of the enemy. Nonetheless Rogers had scouts patrolling up the lake all night and ringed his camp with sentries. Shortly before sunrise on March 12, Rogers crossed his troops to the west shore and led them north. After three miles, they spotted a dog dashing across the lake toward an island. Rogers sent a patrol to scout the island where the dog had disappeared. They found nothing. He then led his troops to Sabbath Day Point where they rested until dark; scouts carrying spyglasses pushed further up the lake. After the scouts returned with the report of all clear, Rogers roused his weary men. He sent Lieutenant William Phillips and fifteen troops on ice skates up ahead, while Ensign Andrew Ross and a detachment plowed through the snow on shore. Rogers and the main body then followed along the lake's edge.

About eight miles from Fort Carillon, one of Phillips's men skated back with word to halt; the lieutenant thought he had spotted a fire on the east shore. Still cautious, Rogers sent Ensign James White to join Phillips and determine whether it was indeed a camp. An hour later, Phillips and White returned with word that the enemy was there. Rogers called in the rest of the advanced and flanking guards and moved into a thicket on the west shore. They were near the base of the five-hundred-foot eminence then called Bald (Pele) Mountain and later Rogers' Rock. There they hid their sleds and packs. Leaving a small guard, Rogers led his men across the ice to attack the enemy camp. But when they crept close all they discovered were some patches of rotten wood that appeared to glow in the dark. They returned to their cache where they spent the remainder of the night.



Map 3: The Battle on Snowshoes

Actual site of the battle roughly a mile southwest of traditional location, marked "X"

On the morning of March 13, Rogers and his officers decided to head inland through the rugged forests around Bald Mountain into the Bernetz Brook valley. The brook flows north for several miles before angling east to join the La Chute River where it bends toward Fort Carillon. That route was much more laborious but far safer than following the lake shore, where they could be easily spotted. But that route could also be a death trap if the enemy learned of their presence and dashed south along the lake to cut off their retreat.

The rangers shuffled atop the four-foot-deep snowdrifts until noon, when Rogers called a three-hour halt and explained his plan. They would advance toward Fort Carillon around three o'clock, after the French patrols had withdrawn for the day. The troops would be split into two groups. Captain Charles Buckley would command the first and Rogers the second; they would be followed by a small rear guard led by Ensigns James White and Joseph Waite. Should they encounter enemy troops, the first division would provoke a French attack then withdraw into an ambush set by the second. It was a good plan, provided Rogers had reliable knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts and a good bit of luck.

For the most part, Rogers's luck that day could not have been worse. The previous day marine Ensign Durantaye had led two hundred Nipissing Indians from the Sault St. Louis and Two Mountain missions, along with twenty Canadians, through Fort Carillon's gates. Those Indians were itching for the glory of combat, scalps, and loot. Yet it appears to have been divination by an Indian clairvoyant rather than scouts that unveiled Rogers and his rangers. A few days earlier, in the Indian camp near Fort Carillon, "an old sorcerer had assured them they would see the English before long." Then on March 12 that clairvoyant suddenly "began to prophesy. He said that the English were very close to Fort Carillon and that they should go out immediately and attack them. The other Indians were so convinced by this example of inspiration & went to the commandant's quarters to inform him that they wanted to set out the next day as they were sure they would come across an English raiding party." Canadians with long exposure to Indian ways did not take such visions lightly. In their mind, such prophecies may well have been the Devil's voice but nonetheless they were often prescient. Fort Carillon's commander, Captain d'Hebecourt, "although astounded by their idea, was very pleased with it as a means of getting rid of them."⁸ For most frontier commanders, Indians were at best a nuisance, devouring supplies and making incessant demands while conducting few raids or even scouting missions.

Cutting loose the Indians became urgent when two Abenaki scouts hurried in around noon on March 13 with word they had discovered the tracks of an enemy force. D'Hebecourt gave permission for Langy and Durantaye to lead the Indians and half the garrison on a patrol down Lake George. Within minutes around a hundred Indians and Canadians, led by Durantaye, grabbed their muskets and surged from the fort. Not long after, a second force of nearly two hundred Indians and