

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN ARMSTRONG'S EXPEDITION AGAINST KITANNING

THE expedition was planned and carried out with great secrecy, for the sole object of punishing the Indians engaged in the massacres along the borders, and who, it was known, had their headquarters at Kitanning, where the chief investigators of all the mischief, Shingas, and Captain Jacobs, lived. The command was entrusted to Lieut. Col. John Armstrong, a brave and prudent officer, and the forces consisted of seven companies.

He left Fort Shirley (Aughwick, Huntingdon County), on the 30th of August, 1756, and on the 3d of September came up with the advanced party at Beaver Dams, a few miles from Frankstown, on the north branch of the Juniata. This junction of the forces occurred on the flat where Guysport now stands, where the little army struck the celebrated trail known as the Kitanning Path. In his official account of the expedition, dated at Fort Littleton, September 14th, 1756, Colonel Armstrong says:

We arrived there (at Beaver Dams) informed that some of our men, having been out upon a scout, had discovered the tracks of two Indians, about three miles this side of the Allegheny mountain, and but a few miles from the camp. From the freshness of the tracks, their killing of a bear cub, and the marks of their fires, it seemed evident they were not twenty-four hours before us, which might be looked upon as a particular providence in our favor that we were not discovered. Next morning we decamped and in two days came within fifty miles of the Kitanning. It was then adjudged necessary to send some persons to reconnoiter the town, and to get the best intelligence they could concerning the situation and position of the enemy; whereupon an officer, with one of the pilots and two soldiers, were sent off for that purpose. The day following we met them on their return, and they informed us that the roads were entirely clear of the enemy, and that they had the greatest reason to believe they were not discovered; but from the rest of the intelligence they gave, it appeared they had not been nigh enough the town either to perceive the true situation of it, the number of the enemy or in what way it might most advantageously be attacked.

We continued our march, in order to get as near the town as possible that night, so as to be able to attack it next morning about daylight, but to our dissatisfaction, about nine or ten o'clock at night one of our guides came and told us that he perceived a fire by the road-side, at which he saw two or three Indians, a few perches distant from our front; whereupon, with all possible silence, I ordered the rear to retreat about one hundred perches, in order to make way for the front, that we might consult how we could best proceed without being discovered by the enemy. Soon after, the pilot returned a second time, and assured us, from the best observation he could make, there were not above three or four Indians at the fire, on which it was proposed that we should immediately surround and cut them off; but this was thought too hazardous, for, if but one of the enemy had escaped, it would have been the means of discovering the whole design; and the light of the moon, on which depended our advantageously posting our men and attacking the town, would not admit of our staying until the Indians fell asleep; on which it was agreed to leave Lieutenant Hogg, with twelve men and the person who first discovered the fire, with orders to watch the enemy, but not to attack them, till break of day, and then, if possible, to cut them off. It was also agreed (we believing ourselves to be about six miles from the town) to leave the horses, many of them tired, with what blankets and other baggage we then had, and to take a circuit of the road, which was very rough and incommodious on account of the stones and fallen timber, in order to prevent our being heard by the enemy at the fire place. This interruption much retarded our march, but a still greater loss arose from the ignorance of our pilot, who neither knew the true situation of the town, nor the best paths that led thereto; by which means, after crossing a number of hills and valleys, our front reached the river Ohio (Alleghany) about one hundred perches below the main body of the town, a little before the setting of the moon, to which place, rather than by the pilot, we were guided by the beating of the drum, and the whooping of the warriors at their dance. It then became us to make the best use of the remaining moon light; but, ere we were aware, an Indian whistled in a very singular manner, about thirty perches from our front, in the foot of a corn field; upon which we immediately sat down, and after passing in silence to the rear, I asked one Baker, a soldier, who was our best assistant, whether that was not a signal to the warriors of our approach. He answered "No," and said it was the manner of a young fellow's calling a squaw after he had done his dance, who accordingly kindled a fire, cleaned his gun and shot it off before he went to sleep. All this time we were obliged to lie quiet and lurk, till the moon was fairly set. Immediately after, a number of fires appeared in different places in the corn field, by which, Bakes said, the Indians lay, the night being warm and that these fires would immediately be out, as they were only designed to disperse the gnats. By this time it was break

of day, and the men, having marched thirty miles, were mostly asleep. The time being long, the three companies of the rear were not yet brought over the last precipice.

For these, some proper hands were immediately dispatched; and the weary soldiers being roused to their feet, a proper number, under sundry officers, were ordered to take the end of hill at which we then lay, and march along the top of the said hill, at least one hundred perches, and so much farther (it being daylight) as would carry them opposite the upper part, or at least the body of the town. For the lower part thereof, and the corn field, presuming the warriors were there, I kept rather the large number of men, promising to postpone the attack in that part of the eighteen or twenty minutes, until the detachment along the hill should have time to advance to the place assigned them – in the doing of which, they were a little unfortunate. The time being elapsed, the attack begun in the corn field, and the men, with all expedition possible, dispatched through several parts thereof, a party being also despatched to the houses, which were then discovered by the light of the day. Captain Jacobs immediately gave the war whoop, and, with sundry other Indians, as the English prisoners afterwards told, cried white men were at last come, and they would have scalps enough, but at the same time, ordered their squaws and children to flee to the woods. Our men with great eagerness, passed through and fired in the corn field, where they had several returns from the enemy, as they also had from the opposite side of the river. Presently, after a brisk fire began among the houses, which, from the house of Captain Jacobs, was returned with a great deal of resolution, to which place I immediately repaired, and found that from the advantage of the house and port holes, sundry of our people were wounded and some killed; and finding that returning the fire upon the house was ineffectual, I ordered the contiguous houses to be set on fire, which was performed by sundry of the officers and soldiers with a great deal of activity, the Indians always firing whenever an object presented itself, and seldom missing wounding or killing some of the people – from which house, in moving about to give the necessary orders and directions, I received a wound from a large musket ball in the shoulders. Sundry persons, during the action, were ordered to tell the Indians to surrender themselves prisoners, but one of the Indians in particular, answered, and said he was a man, and would not be a prisoner; upon which he was told in Indian, he would be burnt. To this answer, he did care, for he would kill four of five before he died; and, had we not desisted from exposing ourselves, they would have killed a great many more, they having a number of loaded buns by them. As the fire began to approach and the smoke grew thick, one of the Indian fellows, to show his manhood, began to sing. A squaw in the same house, and at the same time, was heard to cry and make a noise, but for so doing was severely rebuked by the man; but by and by, the fire being too hot for them, two Indian fellows and a squaw sprang out and made for the cornfield, who were immediately shot down by our people surrounding the houses. It was thought Captain Jacob tumbled himself out at a garret or cockloft window, at which he was shot – our prisoners offering to be qualified to the powder horn and pouch there taken off him, which they say he had lately got from a French officer in exchange for Lieutenant Armstrong's boots, which he carried from Fort Granville, where the Lieutenant was killed.

The same prisoners say they are perfectly assured of his scalp, as no other Indians there wore their hair in the same manner. They also say they know his squaw's scalp by a particular *bob*, and also know the scalp of a young Indian called the King's Son. Before this time, Captain Hugh Mercer, who, early in the action, was wounded in the arm, had been taken to the top of a hill above the town, to whom a number of the men and some of the officers were gathered, from whence they had discovered some Indians pass the river and take the hill, with an intention, as they thought, to surround us and cut off our retreat, from whom I had sundry pressing messages to leave the houses and retreat to the hills, or we should be cut off. But to this I would by no means consent until all the houses were set on fire. Though our spreading upon the hills appeared very necessary, yet did it prevent our researches of the cornfield and river side, by which means sundry scalps were left behind, and doubtless some squaws, children and English prisoners, that otherwise might have been got. During the burning of the houses, which were near thirty in number, we were agreeably entertained with a quick succession of charged guns gradually firing off as reached by the fire, but much more so with the vast explosions of sundry bags and large kegs of gun powder, wherewith almost every house abandoned; the prisoners afterward informing us that the Indians had frequently said they had a sufficient stock of ammunition for ten years' war with the English. With the roof of Captain Jacob's house, when the powder blew up, was thrown the leg and thigh of an Indian, which a child of three or four years old, to such a height that they appeared as nothing, and fell in an adjoining corn field. There was also a great quantity of goods burnt, which the Indians had received in a present but ten days before from the French. By this time I had proceeded to the hill, to have my wound tied up and the blood stopped, where the prisoners, which in the morning had come to our people, informed me that very day to bateaux of

Frenchmen, with a large body of Delaware and French Indians, were to join Captain Jacobs at the Kitanning, and to set out early the next morning to take Fort Shirley, or, as they called it, George Croghan's Fort; and that twenty-four warriors, who had lately come to the town, were set out on the evening before, for what purpose they did not know, – whether to prepare meat, to spy the fort, or to make an attack on some of our back inhabitants. Soon after, upon a little reflection, we were convinced these warriors were all at the fire we had discovered the night before, and began to doubt the fate of Lieutenant Hogg and his party. From this intelligence of the prisoners, our provisions being scaffolded some thirty miles back except what were in the men's haversacks, which were left, with the horses and blankets, with Lieutenant Hogg and his party, – and having a number of wounded people then on hand, by the advice of the officers it was thought imprudent then to wait for the cutting down of the corn field (which was before designed), but immediately to collect our wounded and force our march back in the best manner we could; which we did, by collecting a few Indian horses to carry off our wounded.

From the apprehension of being waylaid and surrounded, (especially by some of the woodsmen,) it was difficult to keep the men together, our march a sundry miles, not exceeding two miles per hour; which apprehensions were heightened by the attempt of a few Indians, who for some time after the march, fired upon each wing and immediately ran off; from whom we received no other damage but one of our men being wounded through both legs. Captain Mercer – being wounded, was induced, as we have many reasons to believe, by some of his men, to leave the main body, with his ensign, John Scott, and ten or twelve men, they being heard to tell him that we were in great danger, and that they could take him into the road a nigh way – is probably lost, there being yet no account of him, and most of his men come in. A detachment was sent back to bring him, but couldn't find him; and upon the return of the detachment it was generally reported he was seen with the above number of men, to take a different road. Upon our return to the place where the Indian fire had been discovered the night before, we met with a sergeant of Captain Mercer's company, and two or three other of his men, who had deserted us that morning, immediately after the action at the Kitanning. These men, on running away, had met with Lieutenant Hogg, who lay wounded in two different part of his body by the roadside. He there told them of the fatal mistake of the pilot, who had assured us there were but three Indians, at the most, at the fire place; but when he came to attack them that morning, according to orders, he found a number considerably superior to his, and believes they killed or mortally wounded three of them the first fire, after which a warm engagement began, and continued for above an hour, when three of his best men were killed and himself twice wounded. The residue fleeing off he was obliged to squat in a thicket, where he might have lain securely until the main body had come up, is this cowardly sergeant and others that fled with him, had not taken him away.

They had marched but a short space when four Indians appeared, on which these deserters began to flee. The Lieutenant then, notwithstanding his wounds, urged and commanded them to stand and fight, which they all refused. The Indians pursued, killing one man and wounding the Lieutenant a third time, through the belly, of which he died in a few hours, but, having sometime before been put on horseback, rode some miles from the place of action. This last attack of the Indians upon Lieutenant Hogg and the deserters was by the beforementioned sergeant represented to us quite in a different light, he telling us that there was a far larger number of the Indians there than appeared to them, and that he and the men with him had fought five rounds; that he had there seen the Lieutenant and sundry others killed and scalped, and had also discovered a number of Indians throwing themselves before us, and insinuated a great deal of such stuff as threw us into much confusion; so that the officers had a great deal to do to keep the men together, but could not prevail upon them to collect what horses and other baggage the Indians had left after the conquest of Lieutenant Hogg and the party under his command in the morning, except a few horses, which some of the bravest of the men were prevailed to collect; so that from the mistake of the pilot who spied the Indians at the fire, and the cowardice of the said sergeant and other deserters, we have sustained a considerable loss of our horses and baggage.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of the enemy killed in the action, as some were destroyed by fire, and others in different part of the corn field; but upon a moderate computation, it is generally believed there cannot be less than thirty or forty killed and mortally wounded, as much blood was found in sundry part of the corn field, and Indians seen – in several places, crawl into the woods on hands and feet, – whom the soldiers, in pursuit of others, then overlooked, expecting to find and scalp the afterward, – and, also, several killed and wounded in crossing the river. On beginning our march we had about a dozen of scalps and eleven English prisoners; but now we find that four of five of the scalps are now missing, part of which were lost on the road, and part in possession of those men who, with Captain Mercer, departed from the main body, which whom went also four of the prisoners, the other seven being

now at this place, where we arrived on Sun, day night, not being separated or attacked through our whole march by the enemy, though we expected it every day. Upon the whole, our pilots understood the true position of the town, and the paths leading to it, so as they have posted us at a convenient place, where the disposition of the men, and the duty assigned to them, could have been performed with greater advantage, we had, by Divine assistance, destroyed a much greater number of the enemy, recovered more prisoners, and sustained less damage, than what we at present have. But through the advantage gained over this, our common enemy, is far from being satisfactory to us, yet we must not despise the smallest degree of success that God is pleased to give, especially at a time of such general calamity, when the attempts of our enemies have been so prevalent and successful. I am sure there was the greatest inclination to do more, had it been in our power, as the officers, and most of the soldiers, throughout the whole action exerted themselves with as much activity and resolutions as could be expected. Our prisoners inform us the Indians have for some time past talked of fortifying at the Kitanning and other towns.